

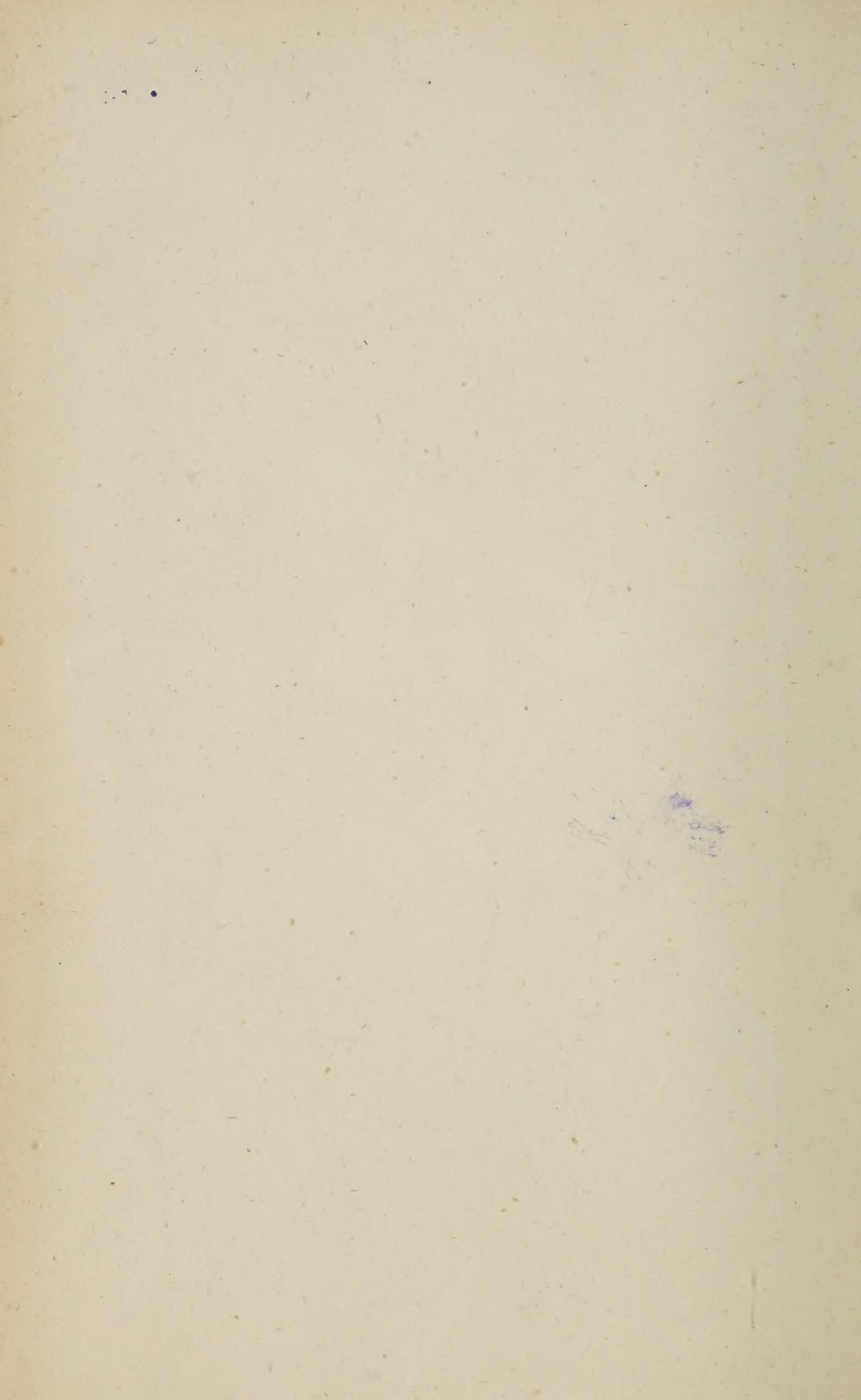
HURST AND HANGER

A HISTORY

IN TWO PARTS




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HURST AND HANGER

VOL. I.



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HURST AND HANGER

A HISTORY IN TWO PARTS

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

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1886

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HURST AND HANGER.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

Low it was, and warm and wide,
A home to love, from sire to son
By white-grown servants waited on.

LEIGH HUNT.

EARLY on a bright winter morning, about the middle of the present century, the door of the drawing-room at Hurst Grange was opened just far enough to admit a face as bright as the day itself.

‘Where’s my little Dora?’

‘Here,’ said a piteous voice from a writing-table.

‘Here,’ echoed a manly tone from an arm-chair. ‘Doing a sum—wrong.’

‘Harry, be quiet,’ came from the writing-table. ‘I wish you were among these legs of mutton yourself, and then you would know what

a fearful quantity we eat, when one comes to add them up.'

'What—what—accounts?' called out the first speaker. 'Put them away this minute, and come out, children. Order your own horses, but don't wait for me.'

'Oh! Uncle John, you promised to come.'

'I know—I know; I'll follow presently, but I've a hundred things to do first; so don't wait a minute, but get out at once—it's a most glorious morning.'

The door was closed, and the speaker gone in an instant.

'Of course it's glorious,' said Dora; 'that's the reason Mrs. Sage has brought me all these books to do: "If you would just please, ma'am, to see they are correct." Oh! Harry, I wish I were you.'

'I'm not surprised at that.'

'But as they must be done, it's of no use to say before eleven for the horses—or a quarter to eleven.'

'Which means a quarter past.'

'It means nothing of the kind. When, I wonder, will you give up the mistaken idea that ladies are more unpunctual than gentlemen?'

'When, indeed! Look at Di: did you ever know her not keep the carriage waiting at least a quarter of an hour? And you'll be just such another when you are grown up.'

‘For the third time, Harry—I *am* grown up ; I am more than seventeen !’

‘Dear me ; then I was grown up a year ago, and never found it out.’

‘Oh dear ! no. Boys are quite different.’

‘But I was “more than seventeen” a year ago. Why isn’t six of one half-a-dozen of the other?’

‘Because you are a boy. How can you grow up before you leave school? Besides, I want you to grow an immense piece more still.’

‘What’s the odds if I don’t?’ and the speaker reared what he considered, not unjustly, a most respectable number of inches against the mantel-piece. ‘A fellow’s none the stronger for being a weed.’

‘Ah! but’—and Dora leant forward, upsetting every account-book on the floor in her eagerness—‘I do so want you to be as tall as Phil.’

‘Phil! Goodness me! How long may Phil have been the height of your ambition?’

‘The height of my ambition,’ she indignantly retorted. ‘No! But he always looks as if he was certain nobody but a Merivale ever grew to be six feet two ; and I should so like you to show him his mistake ! Besides’—here her voice changed—‘soldiers should be tall : it helps—the show.’

‘Do the bills and don’t talk nonsense,’ returned Harry as he marched off on his mission

to the stables, two little terriers trotting at his heels. Dora was left alone, to pick up her account-books and wonder how other people who have no sisters may feel when their only brother chooses to set his heart upon going into the army.

Precisely at a quarter to eleven Harry stood beneath the deep ivy-covered porch of the Grange, to watch his own strong Black Knight and his sister's pretty white Avenel coming round to the door. Their glossy satin coats shone in the sunshine, showing that like every other living creature on the place—and it was a long list—they were well cared for and much petted. Words of wisdom had to be exchanged with the grey-haired coachman, girths examined and fetlocks felt, before Harry, turning round, was at liberty to bestow the remains of his attention on the slim black figure now at his side.

A long whistle came first. 'Hullo! what nave you got yourself up like that for?'

'This is my new habit and hat, Harry dear.' And a merry defiant glance met his. 'I rejoice that you have eyes to see them.'

'Umph! part of the coming-out business, I suppose.'

'Yes. What do you think of them?'

Whatever he might think, Harry was not the brother to be betrayed into any weak approbation.

‘I don’t think about it! A woman may wear just what she likes on her head so long as it’s not a chimney-pot: she has no business with *them*. Now then, up with you!’

But in spite of brotherly contempt, the old servant who stood looking after them as they rode gaily away might be excused for nodding his head in satisfied persuasion that it would be hard to find such another as his young lady—or young gentleman either.

Harold and Dora Vaughan were orphans without a single near relation in the world capable of protecting them. Yet they lived in the happiest of homes, surrounded by everything that the truest affection and most watchful care could devise for their enjoyment and advantage. All this they owed to the master of the Grange—the vicar of Hurst—their own beloved, unequalled Uncle John. He was an uncle by marriage only. Thirty years ago, when Mr. John Merivale had come to settle for life with his young wife in the old Grange as the clergyman of Hurst, he little thought that all the lasting brightness of his home would be brought to it by the children of another—a man whom he had never known, nor was to know. His own married life was short, lasting little more than a year; too short for him to make much acquaintance with his wife’s parents or their one other much younger daughter. Distance and

circumstances combined to keep them apart afterwards, till the death of the father and mother; and the marriage of the daughter, by which she was removed to India, made it appear little likely that Mr. Merivale would ever see much of the family again. At rare intervals he heard of his sister-in-law, of the birth of three children, and then of her early death, which was followed in a very few years by that of her husband. The two eldest children had already been sent to England for their education; the youngest, who had been kept back by the widowed father as a companion in his loneliness, was now brought over at the age of seven by acquaintances who considered that their mission was over when they had seen him sent off to the school at Brighton which already contained both his brother and sister. The three orphans were singularly destitute of near relations, for their father had been an only child, their mother one of two brotherless daughters, and the Court of Chancery, which would have to take charge of their moderate fortunes, seemed likely to be also under the necessity of providing them with a guardian, when one arose in an unexpected quarter.

Nobody would have mentioned the vicar of Hurst as a man likely to undertake the care of children, more especially of children connected with him only through a wife who had died so

long ago that many of his neighbours had never seen her. His life had for the last five-and-twenty years been devoted to his parish, his relations, and many friends, including pets innumerable; he had again grown genial and cheerful, and his time was so constantly and usefully employed that it was impossible to imagine that he could desire such a change for his own pleasure; nor could he bring children into his house without altering old habits and hours, such as are apt to grow dear to a man living alone—to an old bachelor as he was sometimes called by newcomers ignorant of his early married life. Yet the friends who knew him best felt little doubt that it was the remembrance of that long-past time which stirred up his heart and sent him forth in search of the little Indian trio when he heard of them friendless and lonely in their Brighton school.

The sight of the three confirmed his half-formed resolution. Admiration for the fine manly boy of ten years old, compassion for the small white-faced Arthur, and a certain look in Dora's large blue eyes which he had little expected ever to see on earth again, all combined to send him back to his home in a full determination that it should not be an empty home much longer. Dora and Arthur must live with him, since schools were fit for boys, but not for girls or babies, and Harold must go to some

place where the Latin grammar was taught by a man and not by a woman—a humbug!—or how could he be ready for Eton in three years' time? Such was the vicar of Hurst's verdict, and he was not going to change, let his neighbours say what they liked.

The great revolution at Hurst was soon effected, and a pleasing motherly middle-aged lady installed at the Grange with her young charges. This had happened eight years ago, and now had anyone asked Mr. Merivale whether the sacrifice he had made in relinquishing his own absolute freedom, and those regularly irregular hours in which only the selfish or the solitary can indulge, had met with its reward, he would have laughed in the speaker's face, perfectly convinced as he was, that whatever he might have done for the children, they had done a great deal more for him, 'an old crab as he should have been getting by this time!' But no one would ever have put the question who had once heard the tone in which Uncle John would talk of his 'boys and girl and their best of good women.'

This was why the brother and sister, though born far off, looked upon every object around them with the fond affection that childish intimacy alone can give. The village street with the old men leaning over their wicket gates to bask in winter sunshine—the pond beneath the

old ash, coated with ice just thick enough for two little wagtails to run merrily here and there, delighted to find themselves on an unexplored world—the faces in the road—every nook—every turn—all were familiar, all were dear, and beyond a doubt this home that the little wanderers had found was a place that well deserved to be loved.

It was a wavy woodland country, rising often to fine open downs, which healthful and generous sent down abundant crystal streams to water the valleys beneath. A stranger might have hesitated in awarding the palm of beauty to any of these various valleys, but Dora had no doubt whatever on the subject: Hurst was her paradise. There the streams were purer, the flowers sweeter, the hillsides dipped down in more enchanting curves, their crowning beech trees rose up in brighter gold against clearer October skies than in any other place on earth.

The village too was not unworthy of its position: its picturesque gable-ends, steep roofs, and timbered walls showing out in summer amidst green trees and bright cottage gardens, while the evidences of care and comfort, the absence of anything like squalor or wretchedness, proved it to be one of those favoured places where Church and State had long worked hand in hand for the welfare of the inhabitants. Such had been the case for generations, ever since the

Merivale regnant had added the village of Hurst to the Hanger estate. The present owner was Sir Philip Merivale, brother to the vicar of Hurst, whose own home, the Hanger, stood barely two miles away across the downs. Hurst itself had once been the seat of a monastic cell, and the presence of the brotherhood might still be remembered, not only by the stately and beautiful church their pious care had raised in the quiet valley, but by those constant witnesses, local names, used daily by the villagers with little thought as to the source whence they were derived. The Grange itself, quaint and old-world like, 'long and low, with dormers and with oriels lit,' was still only a successor to the building where the monks had once stored their grain. It stood above the village, on a narrow ledge of the hillside, formerly crowded with ricks and farm buildings, but now chiefly devoted to lawn and garden, beneath which the ground dipped down so rapidly that only the tops of the nearest trees could be seen beyond those which skirted the edge of this natural terrace. Through the embowering arms of the latter appeared glimpses of the village, the church's tall spire, and the opposite hillside, half down, half clothed in wood; while on the right hand eyes that loved a wider range might wander down the valley and rest on fold upon fold of soft blue distance, till the last faint outline melted into the sky. A

home full of beauty! and such are still to be found, even in railroad-making, high-farming England, for not all our wicked ways can quite blot out nature's colours, or change her glorious forms; while, as if by a special Providence, wherever she is wildest and fairest, man seems most constrained to hold his sacrilegious hand, and leave her alone to work her own free will in her own sweet heaven-taught way.

CHAPTER II.

HURST GRANGE had, as has been shown, its own special charms, but in importance and dignity it could not for a moment compete with the house already mentioned which stood two miles away across the downs. This was but natural, since all acknowledged the Hanger to be unrivalled by any other place in the neighbourhood—if not in the county—in respect of its extent and picturesque beauty of architecture. It was certain that no other place in the county had been for such a length of time in the hands of one family. Merivales possessed it now, and Merivales had raised the grand old house in by-gone centuries. Of the original building—in which must have dwelt the crusading Sir Hugo de Merivale, who slept cross-legged in white marble within the altar-rails of the little church in the park—very little remained, and the long lines of richly coloured red and tawny brickwork, with their chequer-work of grey, broken into gable ends, relieved by deep mulioned windows, and crowned by twisted chimneys, were the work of Sir Humphrey Merivale, an

Elizabethan hero, who had paid the fashionable homage to the Maiden Queen by converting part of his house into the likeness of an E—that right royal E which represented no dead letter, but a truly stirring and lively reality, to the minds of his own generation. His descendants had cause to thank him for his loyalty, since the three deeply projecting bay windows—the centre one being much the smallest of the three—with their picturesque angles and carved stone ornaments, which adorned the garden front of the house, were a great addition to the picturesqueness of the whole. Increased dignity was also given to this side by the terrace upon which it stood, and old Humphrey had gained the approbation of many an as yet unborn landscape gardener by the quaint elegance of the short flights of steps, three of which broke at regular intervals the long line of the terrace balustrade, and connected it with the pleasure ground below—in his days a bowling green, but now a wide garden, brilliant from early spring to late autumn with masses of the brightest colour.

The history of the Merivale family in all its generations might be seen in brass, stone, and marble within the walls of the little church with its short Norman tower comfortably nestled into a hollow of the downs, beneath a clump of yew-trees which had certainly formed a part of the congregation at the laying of that tower's first

stone. 'Very little better than a mortuary chapel,' the vicar of Hurst would sometimes declare, in a fit of ecclesiastical zeal, though in truth every brass tablet and weeping cherub were dear to his faithful conservative soul. They ran, as he well knew, no danger of disestablishment. Sir Philip Merivale would indeed have been astonished had anyone hinted that Merivales whether living or dead were not entitled to exactly as much space as they chose to occupy within the walls of their own family church.

The old Crusader in his arched recess, the silent spectator of many a family event, would soon see another of these added to the list. The third and last remaining daughter of the present generation would, in a short time, stand as a bride before those altar rails. Two sisters had occupied the place before her in bridal dignity and beauty, nor would Di disgrace the family name. Merivales were traditionally handsome, a fact to which many a face in the long picture gallery could testify, and the beauty of the present Sir Philip's three daughters, with their tall figures, regular features, and glowing tints, had been of so indisputable a kind as to extort the spectator's admiration without allowing him to think twice about the matter, permitting him merely to decide, if he could, whether Frances, Emmeline, or Diana, as they successively appeared in society, were really the handsomest of

the three. One other verdict was also unanimous : all were owned to be ‘regular Merivales,’ and that perhaps not always in the tone or spirit which the fair owners of that name would have expected or approved of. Not that the Miss Merivales would have condescended to trouble themselves much as to any expression of opinion on the part of their country neighbours, in whom they took, as a rule, but a languid interest, reserving their real enthusiasm for London society and for the friends and associates of their brother Phil, otherwise known as Captain Merivale, the eldest son and very fine gentleman of the family. Phil was in the Guards ; Frances had married an Irish peer, Lord Barrymore, seven years ago ; her sister Emmeline had become the wife of a Captain Darrell, one of Captain Merivale’s brother officers, four years later ; and now that the last remaining Miss Merivale was to follow her sisters’ example, Sir Philip Merivale and his wife would be left without any of their children excepting the youngest—and much younger—son, still at Eton, who, possibly because he had enjoyed the advantage of being the youngest, had never yet been known to receive from any living creature the honourable title of ‘a regular Merivale.’ He and Harold Vaughan were in the same house at school, and to visit the Hanger on the first day of the Eton holidays was an institution from which the latter never thought of departing.

This time there was an additional reason for turning their horses' heads in that direction: Harold was to see for the first time Sir Malcolm Campbell, the bridegroom-elect. To all his inquiries, as they rode together side by side, Dora returned assurances that Sir Malcolm seemed a very pleasant sort of man indeed; 'not exactly, you know, Harry, what you might have expected.'

'In what way?'

'Oh, I can't tell, but you'll know when you see him.'

'How did Di lay violent hands upon him then?'

Dora laughed.

'I don't know about the violent hands. Aunt Eleanor says they never had such a devoted lover in the family before—which is very odd, for you know he is a widower. Oh! isn't it wonderful to think of Di with a daughter of twelve?'

'*Twelve!* Awful! I thought she was about two. Why, everyone calls her "the little girl."'

'I believe she is small of her age, and perhaps they want her to seem as young as she can.'

'Ah! trust our well-beloved Di for keeping her under,' returned Harold, as rising in his stirrups he bestowed an expressive cut on Black Knight's unoffending shoulder. 'I wouldn't be in that little girl's little shoes for something!'

‘Oh, Harry! it would be too dreadful to be a cruel stepmother! Besides there is Sir Malcolm to take care of her, and he is very fond of her.’

‘I’d back Di to have her own way if she had ten husbands to get it out of, and very likely she’s the cleverest, and will be able to talk him round.’

‘I don’t know if Sir Malcolm is clever, but they say he has a very clever brother, Mr. Angus Campbell.’

‘You don’t mean to say he’s Angus Campbell’s brother?’

‘Yes, he is. Why? Do you know him?’

‘To be sure I do! He came down to play for Marylebone two years running.’

‘But is that all you know about him?’

‘Oh no! one of Waller’s uncles knows him.’ Waller was Harold’s one very particular friend. ‘He is clever if you like it. Got everything at Oxford, and a double-first to finish up with, and he’s getting on stunningly at the bar—couldn’t come down for Marylebone last summer, he was so busy.’

‘Oh, Harry! how happy he must be!’

‘Ah! there’s a hero for you—and he’s more. for *I* believe a fellow may get a lot of things and be a muff at the end of it, but Angus Campbell isn’t that, for he sent a ball of mine right down through the trees towards the river. such a drive it was!’

‘How delightful!’

‘You wouldn’t have thought so, I can tell you, if you’d been trying for the eleven; but I had him next over.’

‘I don’t mean that. But to be so wonderfully clever—he *must* be happy. How proud they must be of him! He has a sister, I know. I wonder whether——’

She checked herself suddenly, but not without a little sigh, for deep and ardent had been Dora’s desire that her own brother should win such honours as these. All her ambition for him had taken this direction, and once it had been an ambition full of hope, as she knew him to be really clever. Harold knew it quite as well as she did, and had grown idle on the knowledge, when he had found with how little trouble he could, for a while, keep up with other boys. Then, seeing himself in time surpassed by those whose natural powers he knew to be much less than his own, he had become disgusted and voted all learning a bore. In vain Dora pleaded; vain too was Uncle John’s occasional exhortation, ‘Stick to your books, my boy; take warning by me and stick to your books.’ What result this advice might have had if the consequences of early idleness had been exhibited by the speaker in a more unpleasant form, cannot be told; things being as they were, it had no effect whatever. Harold stuck to

everything except his books. He became a first-rate cricketer and an excellent head of a house, —a great man in his own schoolboy world, and popular in so far that he was generally known, and not a little looked up to. In the sense of having many intimate friends he was not popular, being of too fastidious, as well as too reserved a nature. Dora often thought that no one but herself, and perhaps Aunt Eleanor, really knew how much sensitive feeling lay behind her brother's half-sarcastic, half-indifferent manner. But one great friend Harold had, as has been already mentioned, and when he came to the conclusion that much learning was an unnecessary luxury, he lent a willing ear to Frederick Waller's persuasions, and wrote home word to his uncle that he had made up his mind to be a soldier like his friend, the influence of an uncle of the latter at the Horse Guards being relied upon for getting them both into the same regiment.

Merivales had been too much in the habit of going into the army for the vicar of Hurst to think of making an objection to the plan. Had Harold chosen his own profession he would have been better pleased, and Dora would then have been more certain of a home with him should she need it; but it would never do to try to force a young fellow into taking orders, and the army was a fine thing—better a thousand times than turning into a lawyer and a Londoner—a

phase of life against which Uncle John had an unconquerable prejudice. Such reflections might satisfy him, but could not console Dora. Brought up as she had been during the not yet broken, and apparently never to be broken forty years' peace of Europe, she had learnt to look upon soldiers as needless and useless appendages to any country, their lower ranks consisting of the idlest characters that the villages could supply, and their upper of the most empty-headed conceited gentlemen in whose society she had ever been thrown; her opinion on the latter point being guided entirely by the specimens Phil had from time to time condescended to bring over to Hurst. And that Harold, her own brother, should choose such a life and such companions as these, with no necessity, no object, no prospect before him, except, perhaps, a wooden leg, a pension, or the possibility of growing in time like Phil! And now to hear of this Mr. Campbell doing all that Harold ought to have done, it was impossible not to be envious! How strange that Di should not have mentioned such a brother more particularly. Yet not strange either, for Di had never cared for those things. But what would he think of Di? Must not young ladies in general appear very stupid and ignorant to him; as stupid as the unfashionable ones did to Phil? Ah! if one had done what he had, there would be some excuse for

thinking yourself better than all the rest of the world!

A 'Hold hard!' from Harold interrupted these meditations. Checking her horse she looked round. Across the downs of which they had now reached the beginning, a boy of about fourteen was cantering fast towards them on a beautiful little chestnut pony, so fast that he only pulled up just in time to drop down the steep chalk bank which edged the road immediately in front of their horses' heads.

'Hallo! what are you up to?' and 'Oh! Charlie, take care,' were the brother and sister's respective greetings, while Charles Merivale himself had only breath enough left to ejaculate 'The hariers;' but it was in a tone that showed the full importance of the subject.

'The hariers,' cried Harold, 'where?' And rising in his stirrups he threw a quick glance all around the wide view now opening before them, while an eager greeting was going on between the other two; for Charlie, like Harold, had returned from Eton only the day before.

'Not here,' answered Charlie, coming to his side, 'but over the Ridgeway, down by Park Farm. Papa asked Mr. Falconer if he would mind taking them out there to-day, as there are so many people at home, and they didn't want to shoot this morning, so I said I'd come and tell you; I thought you'd be sure to be coming over.'

‘There’s a good boy,’ returned Harold, promptly turning his horse’s head towards the open down. ‘Come on, Dora.’

But Dora hesitated ; not from unwillingness—for there was nothing in the world she would like better—but the mature mind of seventeen will be influenced by higher considerations than those of personal pleasure when a large luncheon party has shortly to be faced.

‘Consider my habit, Harry.’

‘Rubbish !’

‘And my hat.’

‘Bosh !’

‘Likewise my hair. Oh dear ! I wish I wasn’t grown up—or that I was a boy.’

‘Rubbish and nonsense ! Come on this minute.’

‘Oh ! Dora, you *must* come ; it won’t be half the fun without you.’ This was from another speaker and in a different tone.

‘Well, but, Charlie, will you promise me there will be no thorns in the hedges ?’

‘Oh yes ! Or we won’t go over them if you don’t like.’

‘*Won’t* we !’ shouted Harold, impatiently. ‘Come on, both of you, and let the habit look after itself. Clothes were made to be worn, and torn too, I should hope ; but women are such slaves, such wretched idiotic slaves, to their miserable garments ! I’d rather wear sackcloth than

be——’ Whether a woman or a slave cannot be known, as Black Knight had borne his rider so far in advance that the last words were lost upon the bare hillside over which all three were now cantering as fast as their respective horses could carry them.

CHAPTER III.

‘You are getting too heavy for Pixie,’ said Harold as he turned in his saddle to examine his companion’s pony with a critical eye; ‘you want a stronger beast.’

‘No, I don’t,’ returned Charlie promptly, as he patted Pixie’s neck; ‘I told papa I didn’t, just now.’

‘Then you were wrong. You must ride eight stone if you are an ounce, and that is too much for such a little creature to carry.’

‘He never minds it, do you, Pixie?’

‘A bigger pony would carry you much better now,’ persisted Harold.

Charlie was silent, for the speaker, whether as ‘Vaughan’ at Eton, or as ‘Harry’ at home, was much too great a man to have his word long disputed; yet he felt that some still higher authority must be produced before he could consent to part from his beloved little Welshman, whose exploits were the admiration of the hunting-field and the pride of his young master’s heart.

Now Harold's attention was called another way, for they had reached the summit of the Ridgeway, the highest point of the downs in this direction; and drawing their horses' reins, all looked eagerly on the new tract of country opening before them. It was a wide and extensive view, lovely when clothed in summer verdure, hardly less beautiful now with winter's delicate lights and shadows adorning hill and plain. But it brought only disappointment to the young hunters, for though a farm and its outbuildings lay at some distance beneath them, neither horse nor hound could be discovered near it.

‘Where can they be?’ said Dora.

‘Be!’ echoed her brother in a tone of disgust; ‘the other side of the Hanger for all I know—miles away most likely. What made you say they were at Park Farm, Charlie, when it's no such thing?’

‘They were to come here—Papa said so; they must have gone on somewhere.’

‘If they had, we should see them. Stay, what's that?’

Through the clear air one or two distant sounds now reached them—music to Harold's ears.

‘They must be drawing the fields the other side of the Long Holt. Come on! make haste!’

So saying, he began to gallop forward towards a large wood, which at some distance terminated the downs to the right of their present position. The others followed him as fast as they were able—Pixie ready to die rather than be distanced by the larger steeds. On leaving the downs and approaching the wood the character of the ground changed; a cart-track full of ruts led into the latter. To reach it they must leap a low hedge, with a ditch beyond. Harold slackened his pace, rode a short distance down the hedge, and looked round for his sister.

‘This way; all right. Now then—now then, follow me and take it easy.’

Gathering together her flowing skirt she obeyed and found herself landed in safety at his side. But the place chosen by Charlie proved less fortunate—the ditch was wider, the ground more slippery; the consequence being that the next moment Charlie lay extended on the grass of the rough lane they had now entered, while Pixie appeared to be nowhere in particular, so deeply had he sunk into the ditch.

Dora could not restrain a cry of alarm, and though Harold’s first words, ‘That comes of rushing at his fences—foolish fellow,’ might not sound particularly sympathising, almost as soon as they were uttered he had flung Black

Knight's bridle to his sister and run to raise the prostrate boy—unhurt, as happily proved to be the case—and only for the first minute or two dizzy with his fall.

‘Where's Pixie?’ he said, turning round, ‘is he hurt?’

Pixie was lying in the most uncomfortable of attitudes across the deep ditch, his forefeet on one side and the hind legs on the other. Charlie explained that it was not while in the air, but on reaching, or rather failing to reach the farther bank, that he had partly fallen, partly thrown himself off, as he feared the pony was going to roll over. Pixie, however, seemed incapable either of rolling or rising, so entirely was he buried in the ditch.

‘Get up,’ said Harold, seizing the bridle. ‘What are you lying here for, you stupid creature?’

He tugged with no very gentle hand at the pony's mouth, but in vain.

‘Pixie!’ cried Charlie; ‘poor old Pixie, get up.’

At his young master's voice Pixie struggled and raised his head, but only to lay it down on the bank once more with a little neigh of pain, which said as plainly as words could have spoken, ‘I can't do it—so don't ask me.’

‘Oh, Harry! he must be hurt,’ cried Charlie, his eyes growing wide with alarm.

Harold, without answering, jumped down into the ditch, there to examine the fallen pony, but to no purpose. There did not seem to be any external wound, yet neither efforts nor coaxing could induce him to make the slightest movement, and when some minutes had passed and brought no change, all the three began to feel extremely uncomfortable.

‘Harry,’ said Charlie in a low voice, ‘you don’t think he can have broken a leg?’

‘No, I’ve thought of that; but I’m sure they’re all right. I’ll tell you what though, we want a rope. We shan’t get him up without help. I’ll ride on to Park Farm and get someone to come.’

He jumped on his horse and rode off as fast as possible, leaving the two others to watch disconsolately by Pixie’s side. The poor little animal was evidently suffering, and Charlie’s face grew wretched as he listened to his favourite’s distressed breathing, and gazed at his upturned eye, which seemed asking for the relief which no one could give him.

‘Pixie, my darling,’ he cried, flinging himself down to embrace the pony’s neck, ‘what is it? Oh, Dora, he’ll die—I know he’ll die!’

‘No, Charlie dear, don’t despair; it may be nothing very bad—the cramp perhaps,’ she answered, secretly thankful that Harold was not there to hear the desperate suggestion.

‘Pixie never has the cramp,’ was Charlie’s mournful answer, and Dora felt herself a wretched comforter. She dismounted from her own horse, and fastening the bridle to a gatepost, came to her companion’s side.

‘See,’ said Charlie, ‘how miserable he looks, with his poor legs doubled up under him. Oh dear! is there *nothing* we can do?’

At that moment a sound from the wood caught Dora’s ear. ‘Listen,’ she cried, ‘the harriers must be coming nearer; run, Charlie, see if you cannot find them. Two or three men might lift him out perhaps, without waiting for the rope. I’ll stay here; I won’t stir till you come back.’

Away flew Charlie, catching at any hope, and Dora was left to keep watch alone. Waiting is weary work, and after two or three solitary minutes she heard with no little delight the hoofs of a horse coming down the lane, and looked eagerly for the help which she trusted Charlie had found and sent. But from the expression of surprise upon the rider’s face as he approached the little group this could not have been the case. He was a stranger, and a gentleman—so much Dora perceived, when, raising his hat, he said in courteous tones: ‘May I ask if I can be of any use? I am sorry to see there has been an accident.’

‘Thank you. Yes, the pony has fallen.’

‘So I see. I trust no one is hurt?’

‘No; thank you. I was not—I mean—it was not I was thrown; and no one is hurt.’ She was beginning to blush a little, remembering, now she remembered herself at all, that a young lady alone with two horses in a country lane might be thought rather a curious sight.

‘I see——’ and the gentleman looked round at Avenel’s side-saddle. ‘But’—and jumping off his own horse he came close to Pixie—‘is not that Charlie Merivale’s pony?’

He had come from the Hanger then, and this conviction banished Dora’s shyness in a moment.

‘Yes,’ she cried eagerly; ‘oh yes, it is! He fell in leaping the ditch, and we cannot make him get up. Charlie has gone for help, and my brother, but perhaps you can tell me. Oh! do you think he is really hurt? May I hold your horse? It would be such a comfort to know there was nothing very bad.’

He relinquished his own bridle to her care, and taking Pixie’s instead, repeated, though more gently, some of Harold’s unsuccessful manœuvres to induce him to rise; then, with considerable trouble, loosened the girths and removed the saddle. This done, he examined Pixie afresh, and Dora’s heart sank at the grave shake of the head with which he passed his hand down the pony’s back—even before the verdict was given.

‘Poor little thing! he will never get up again.’

‘What is it?’ she cried.

‘A broken back, I am sorry to say—as I feared at first sight from the extraordinary way in which he is lying.’

‘Oh! what will Charlie do?’ Large tears, which not even the presence of a stranger could repress, rushed to Dora’s eyes.

‘Ah! poor boy. The loss of a favourite pony is a very melancholy affair at his age; but here come other people to give you their opinion. I wish I could hope it would be a more favourable one.’

It was a party of men-servants from the Hanger, who had been out on foot to see the meet. Among them was the coachman himself. Harold appeared from the other direction nearly at the same moment, accompanied by some of the farmer’s men, so that a large circle now surrounded the poor doomed Pixie, for that such he was experienced eyes had no difficulty in perceiving. ‘But dear, dear,’ said Simpson, the coachman, whose lamentations were, as might be expected, the deepest of all, ‘it will half break Master Charlie’s heart to hear of it, he is so uncommon fond of the poor little creatur’. Where might he be, Mr. Harry, now?’

Harold, who since his return had been standing in perfect silence by Pixie’s side, biting

his under lip, only turned away at the coachman's question with a gruff 'Don't know ;' but Dora, who had retreated from the group, drew near again to tell them that Master Charlie had gone off into the wood in hope of finding help.

'Best get it over then before he's back, if we could,' said the compassionate Simpson, 'or keep him away altogether, if so be as Mr. Harry can manage it. I must be off to Gibbs's farm at once, 'tis the nearest. Will you let me have Black Knight, sir, to save time ; for 'tis no use keeping a poor beast in pain.'

'Take him and be quick,' said Harold, shortly ; 'and, Dora,' he added in a lower voice, 'go with him. You can ride on to the Hanger alone.'

'But,' she remonstrated in much distress, 'I cannot bear going away from Charlie, it seems so cruel.'

'Nonsense. I'm going to find him myself, and how could you stay alone here with all these people ?'

'Then tell him,' she whispered, 'how sorry I am. Oh, Harry, are not you sorry ?'

'A fellow may be sorry for a thing without howling about it, I suppose.'

The words were rough enough ; but Dora knew that there was something in the corner of Harold's blue eye which he was particularly anxious nobody should see. He hurried her on

to her saddle with so little ceremony before dashing off up the lane himself, that the strange gentleman came forward once more to inquire whether she were safely seated.

‘Yes, thank you. My brother has to make haste, he is going to Charlie.’

‘A sad errand, I am afraid,’ and he raised his hat as she prepared to move onward with the coachman. She checked her horse, however, for a moment, and said, with an effort that brought back a bright colour to her cheek, ‘I ought to thank you for having been so kind.’

‘Not at all,’ was of course the polite answer, with an equally polite smile, which she did not even see, so intently were her eyes taking a last look on the poor pony, the companion in many happy rides. It had to be a short one; Simpson was anxious to be off on his melancholy errand, and she would not keep him. On their way to the farm she could find voice only for instructions respecting the hairs the coachman was to bring her from Pixie’s tail that she might make a chain for his young master. But before they parted at the farm gate, remembering that she would have to give an account of all at the Hanger, she asked whether he could tell her the name of the gentleman who had come up the first.

‘Mr. Campbell, ma’am. Sir Malcolm’s brother; he came to the Hanger last night.’

‘Oh, Mr. Campbell.’ An hour ago Dora would not have thought it possible the intelligence should interest her so little.

‘Please be sure to remember the hair, Simpson,’ were her parting words as she began her solitary ride to the Hanger.

CHAPTER IV.

‘MAMMA, I do assure you it is out of the question.’

‘But, my dear Di, we must think of what is kind.’

‘We must think of what is possible, mamma, and with all my own affairs to attend to, and those girls downstairs to see after, and walking with Malcolm as well, how can I possibly find time to be running after a child?’

The scene was Lady Merivale’s sitting-room; the subject of discussion the unfortunate ‘little girl,’ whom Sir Malcolm, with more zeal than discretion, had requested permission to bring with him on this his last lover’s visit to the Hanger, being especially anxious that his dear Di should grow attached to her future daughter as quickly as possible, while his dear Effie on her part could not too soon begin to know and love the person who was to make both their future lives so happy. If the plan had not been attended in all respects with these happy results, Sir Malcolm had never found it out. Little did

he imagine the complaints privately poured forth by his future bride touching this unnecessary infliction of a stepdaughter before marriage, and as little that poor little Effie, utterly forlorn in a world of strangers, sobbed herself to sleep with unfailing regularity every night of her visit.

‘I thought, my dear child,’ answered Lady Merivale, ‘that all your things were ready.’

‘I’ve heaps of letters to write about them still.’

‘And there is Lina in the drawing-room, you know.’

‘Lina doesn’t want to be bothered with people all day long, any more than I do.’

‘Then if you cannot take Effie out this morning, had we not better send for her to sit here. It must be dull all alone in the nursery with only Lina’s baby.’

‘Now, mamma,’ said Di, resolutely, ‘I am determined you shall not worry yourself about her. Having her in here is not to be thought of. Much better leave her with the baby; the only creature in the house she is not mortally afraid of, I do believe.’

‘Poor child! poor little girl. I wish we could make her feel happier among us.’

‘It can’t be helped. Malcolm should not have brought her down. No one but a man would ever have thought of it!’

Di flung back her head with an injured air

as she settled herself once more in the arm-chair, from which she had been leaning forward in the warmth of her argument. Lady Merivale laid down her knitting and looked at her daughter—handsome, happy, young, and prosperous,—such a sight as might gladden any mother's heart. Yet the soft hazel eyes that dwelt upon it had more anxiety than pride in them. Had Lady Merivale's gentle counsel and example been oftener followed by her daughters than their own wills and judgments, the family character they had jointly established for themselves would have been greatly modified. But the delicate health which constantly confined their mother to her room had made it a still harder task for her than it would otherwise have been to guide and influence three headstrong girls, whose characters were in many respects the very opposite of her own.

‘Dear Di,’ she said, ‘I am sure, whatever you say in jest, that in reality your good feeling will lead you to do everything you can for a little motherless girl. You will do your duty by her, I know, and be a mother to her as far as possible.’

‘Oh yes, of course,’ said Di impatiently; ‘we shall get on very well together by-and-by, I dare say—no fear about that.’

‘And, my child, you won't forget that your life will not be the less happy because you

have duties to think of as well as its enjoyments.'

'My first duty,' answered Di, with decision, 'will be to get her a governess; just such a person as Miss Goode is—who would take all the trouble off one's hands, and bring her up properly. By the way, I'll write to Goody herself and ask her if she cannot come.'

'My dear Di, you forget! Miss Goode has gone to her brother, or she would be at Hurst now. He lost his wife last year, and was left with six little children, poor man.'

'Let the poor man find himself another wife then, for now I think of it I certainly must have Goody.'

'You are jesting! What would Dora say? She thought it such a dreadful thing that Miss Goode should leave her, even to keep her own brother's house.'

'Never mind what she says. Will she be over here to-day?'

'I hope so. Ah!'—as the door opened—
'here she is.'

Dora it was, but such a grave Dora that Lady Merivale was instantly certain something must be wrong, and, frightened at once for Charlie, Harold, Sir Malcolm, and everyone else, who rushed into her thoughts with all the speed of fear, could have uttered an exclamation of thankfulness on finding that poor Pixie was the

only victim. The tale, however, was sad enough, and Dora received the sincere condolences of both her hearers—for Di loved horses—in a manner that she felt to be not a little comforting after the interview she had just undergone with Sir Philip, to whom, as in duty bound, she had explained all on first arriving at the house. Sir Philip had found no fault with herself—he could hardly do so, seeing there was none to find with anybody—but the tone in which he regretted ‘this remarkably unfortunate affair’ had spoken an inward conviction that somehow or other these things never occurred excepting when thoughtless young people went scampering about the country by themselves. Glad indeed had Dora been to escape from that alarming library to the Oak room, as Lady Merivale’s sitting-room was called—from the frigid to the torrid zone, as she and Harold had often called it to one another—to throw aside her hat, pull off her gloves, and cast herself on the floor by Aunt Eleanor’s side, there to feel the soft touches she loved so well stroking forehead, hair, and cheek. How many troubles of her young life they had stroked away! But the event of this morning had been too tragic for Dora to be cheerful again now. She drew down the caressing hand, and resting her cheek upon it said sadly, ‘Charlie must have known it all long ago now!’

‘Yes, poor dear boy, how he will grieve!’

But his father will get him another pony, he may be sure.'

' Ah ! but, Aunt Eleanor, that's not the same at all. Think how long he has had Pixie—five years !'

She sat up, and leaning forward with her cheeks resting on her hands, meditated mournfully over the flight of time. Five years it was since Pixie had been first ridden over to Hurst by his rosy-cheeked master. She remembered perfectly how Charlie had dismounted and held him carefully while another rider—small, delicate, and golden-haired—had been lifted on to his back by her uncle, and led gently along. This was her own brother, little Arthur, Charlie's constant companion and play-fellow. Ever since their own arrival at Hurst these two had been constantly together, till Arthur's short life was over. He had always been a white-cheeked, large-eyed little boy, and four years ago they had lost him. The low marble cross above the grass mound in Hurst churchyard had for the last four years been an anchor to bind Harold and Dora's hearts more firmly than ever to the kind home and the old church, beneath whose shadow the little wanderer had been laid. If sympathy could soothe their grief, they had had it in abundance. Uncle John had cried like a child ; everyone had shared their sorrow ; but no one, not even

themselves, had been more unhappy than Charlie. He was seven years younger than Di, and had known no young companions at home until the arrival of the Vaughans, since which time they had been, either at Hurst or the Hanger, almost inseparable companions; and for the last four years he seemed to have succeeded to that place in Dora's and Harold's hearts which the death of their little brother would otherwise have left unfilled. Dora would have liked to stay now and indulge her own thoughts by Lady Merivale's side much better than to obey the summons to luncheon, where numerous guests, mostly unknown ones, were gathering round the table. It was not pleasant to have to repeat the morning's tale to a number of strange ears, or to hear the indifferent remarks with careless expressions of passing compassion for Pixie. The most interesting part of the story to some of her lady hearers appeared to be the moment that introduced Mr. Campbell on the scene; his attentions to poor Pixie lent a much stronger interest in the pony's fate than had been felt before; perhaps also a stronger interest to the relator, for more than one pair of eyes were turned towards her, as though their owners were inwardly considering what, while attending to Pixie, Mr. Campbell might have been thinking of Pixie's companion. It was not a curiosity that had ever troubled Dora's mind, nor did it

do so now. Glad when her luncheon and story were ended, she watched for the first opportunity in which to escape and return to Lady Merivale, who was herself but seldom able to join the party below. Hardly had she resumed her place by the latter's side when Di also re-entered the room, displeasure sitting in her face.

‘Was ever anything so provoking,’ she cried, throwing a letter upon the table. ‘Marion Scott writes to say she cannot take Effie after all till after the 1st—“will not be in town before the 30th—and trusts it may not inconvenience us to keep her here!”’

‘Well, my dear, it will not,’ said her mother.

‘And writes to *me*,’ continued Di, not noticing this remark, ‘because she doesn’t like to “trouble Malcolm at such a time.” Why she should prefer troubling me I really cannot imagine!’

Lady Merivale again tried to assure her daughter that Effie was most welcome at the Hanger, and would be in nobody’s way, until her aunt was ready to receive her, but in vain. Di would agree to nothing of the kind, and seemed ready to prove that there was scarcely an hour in the whole twenty-four when the luckless Effie might not confidently be expected to be greatly in the way of some one or other inhabitant of the Hanger.

Dora could hardly help laughing. 'Why does Sir Malcolm not take her away and bring her back with him?' she asked.

'Take her away!' said Di pettishly, 'to an empty house in the Highlands at this time of year, how can he? And he isn't coming back at all!'

'Not even to be married?'

'Nonsense! of course he's coming back for that, but not here; you'll have to take him in yourselves.'

'Oh, Di! not really.' Dora sprang to her feet with a look of consternation.

'Yes, indeed, and the adorable Angus with him as best man! How absurdly those girls downstairs go on about Angus, to be sure.'

'In what way?' asked her mother.

'Oh! he is the rage just now; he is clever and good-looking, and can talk, and everything he says and does is perfection. The mothers are nearly as bad as the daughters, though he *is* a younger son, but then everyone knows he is to have Kildrummie by-and-by, of course, so Angus is all the fashion. He bears it pretty calmly—I must say that for him!'

Dora was gazing at Di in despair.

'Mr. Campbell coming to Hurst,' she cried; 'that is dreadful—worse than Sir Malcolm! Why should they come at all?'

'Because Malcolm chooses to think it is not

the correct thing for him to come here—a piece of nonsense, but so it is. So of course he must go to Hurst, and bring his best man with him.'

'But,' pleaded Dora with a young house-keeper's genuine alarm, 'how *can* I manage for such a fine gentleman? Oh, Di! do keep him here.'

'Poor little Dora,' returned Di with patronising good-humour, 'he won't eat you, and I can tell you that every other bridesmaid I have would be charmed at the prospect.'

'And it will be New Year's Eve, the very night of our tree, and I know Uncle John will not put that off for anyone! Oh, what shall I do! If they were only two little boys—children are no trouble; but a fine London gentleman, and so dreadfully clever!'

'Children no trouble,' cried Di; 'what a wonderful notion! However, since you think so, I wish you would take Effie off to Hurst. Really now, it would be a very good plan.'

Dora's eyes opened rather widely.

'A nice companion for you and Harold,' proceeded Di.

'Harry doesn't like little girls.'

'Haven't you taught him better by this time?' asked Lady Merivale, smiling.

'No, Aunt Eleanor; he sometimes says I am the only one he can stand at all.'

‘I shall speak to Uncle John about it,’ concluded Di.

Dora privately determined to do the same. To have Harold’s Christmas holidays spoiled by the presence of a strange little girl would be rather too bad! But at that moment came a knock—such a ghost of a knock—at the door, and such a white piteous little form crept in after it, that Dora’s heart smote her directly. The new comer was a child apparently not more than nine or ten years of age, most delicately made, with a pale face, and pale shining hair, everything about her being pale and colourless, excepting the fine line of eyebrow, the long lashes, and startled anxious eyes; all of which looked as if they had been painted in soft grey upon a background of ivory. Effie trembled—it might have been either from cold or fear—as she tried to stammer out some message from her father to her future stepmother—on which Di left the room with an impatient exclamation, declaring that she must find out what Malcolm wanted for herself. Effie, so soon as she judged her to be at a safe distance, began to creep silently back towards the door.

‘Come here, my dear,’ said Lady Merivale, ‘and tell me what you have been doing to-day.’

‘Nothing,’ was the faint answer.

‘And where were you going now?’

‘I wasn’t going anywhere.’

A little more questioning extracted from Effie that since the nursery dinner she had been sitting in one of the gallery windows watching for her father's return from hunting ; that he had just come in, and with him someone else who had run by her very fast. 'His name?' Effie hesitated, and coloured, and then ventured on a doubtful 'Mr. Charlie?' The others smiled, and Dora rose directly.

'Has he come in? I must go to him, then. How cold you are,'—she took hold of Effie's hands—'and no wonder, waiting about in that gallery for an hour! But Aunt Eleanor will let you sit down in my corner and get warm while I am gone.'

'Poor little thing!' she thought to herself as she took her rapid way through many a winding passage and staircase to Charlie's quarters. 'I really think she had better come to us, we would keep her warm, at any rate, in this cold weather.'

On reaching a low dark door, she knocked once or twice ; then, receiving no answer, looked in. There lay Charlie, his face buried in a pillow, wet with the tears that his boyish manliness had been struggling to keep back before the eyes of others for more than an hour past. But Dora was welcome to see him cry, and, with her own eyes quickly filling, both at the sight of his sorrow and for its cause, she sat beside

him, holding his hand, and hearing, with the consoling power of genuine faith, how there never had been, and never could be, any such pony as Pixie, and how impossible it was that Charlie should at any period of life be able to bear the thought of going out hunting again. She agreed to it all, excepting when he bitterly accused himself of cruelty in riding Pixie after he had become too heavy for his favourite; and half an hour spent in attempts at consolation succeeded so well that Charlie was even induced in time to believe he must be hungry, and to come down with her to the empty dining-room, where, having begun his luncheon to please her, he was not incapable of finishing it to please himself.

Dora's next business was to find her brother, and inform him of Di's plan for their benefit and employment during the holidays—a piece of information received by Harry much as she had expected—with indignant inquiries as to whether Di imagined they kept ‘a Foundling,’—pointed remarks on the tender mercies of stepmothers,—and expressions of the liveliest aversion towards all little girls! ‘It was in fact about the coolest thing he ever heard of, as he should certainly let her ladyship know!’

Harold and Di were friends and foes of old, and there can be little doubt he would have kept his word had not fortune herself conspired

against him in a most remarkable manner. Ten minutes afterwards, as he was rushing with more haste than care round one of the many dark corners with which the old passages of the Hanger abounded while on his way to Lady Merivale's sitting-room, it was his fate to encounter and absolutely to knock down the very little lady against whose presence he was determined to protest. Somewhat abashed he stopped, and, seeing no help for it, picked her up, and led her to the light, with a gruff inquiry as to whether she were hurt. Effie, who spent most of her time on the verge of tears, could not entirely restrain them now, but they fell so quietly over her pale cheeks, her meek 'I beg your pardon' was so timidly humble, that Harold, ashamed and disarmed, knelt down by the chair on which he had placed her, blamed himself for a great rough fellow, and even won a faint smile by offering to stand up on the spot for her to knock him down in return, if it would be the least satisfaction. Never did anyone look less likely to claim her rights or gain a victory than little Effie, and yet a victor she certainly was on this occasion, for when Dora returned to the Oak room there was Harold established on the rug, putting the serious-minded old cat into bands and spectacles for Effie's particular benefit, and instructing her meanwhile as to the names and natures of the numerous pets

with which she would make friends at Hurst Grange !

‘Of course I knew she would *have* to come,’ was all the explanation he vouchsafed afterwards to his astonished sister ; ‘so what was the good of keeping it a secret ? But females are fond of mystery.’

CHAPTER V.

Und kommt die Weihnacht dann in Schnee und Regen,
Dann hängt er einen schönen Frühling leise
Im Weihnachtsbaum in Stub' und Kammer auf.

HEBEL.

‘NOT so bad—that’s right, Jerry,’ and Harold stepped back breathless to contemplate a fine young fir-tree, which, with the old gardener’s assistance, he had just carried into the dining-room at Hurst Grange.

‘What a beauty, Jerry! Where did you get it?’

‘Well, Miss Dora, we’ve *abin* and *borrer’d* ‘im for a bit.’

‘Which means,’ said Harold, ‘that Jerry has been stealing out of Sir Philip’s pet plantation, and thinks he won’t be found out and had up, when here’s Master Charlie going to tell of him the moment he gets home.’

Old Jerry’s face expanded slowly into a deep chuckle of delight at this exquisite idea, which ended by Harry turning him out of the room with the remark that he was not to set eyes on the tree any more until it was so altered that he wouldn’t know it again.

There must be a hard day's work done first ; but the workers were willing, and the materials plentiful. Rows and piles of presents—toys, clothes, sugarplums, books—the useful and useless being mixed in due proportion—covered the floor. To give Christmas presents to all his family and dependents and to many of his parishioners had long been Mr. Merivale's custom, and of late years the custom had taken the more interesting form of a tree, under the direction of Dora and Harold. Everybody must have a present—this was the first principle ; and nobody must know what it was going to be till the proper time—this was the second—not always an easy one to carry out. However, anyone who happened to encounter a parcel with his or her name upon it was always wise enough to turn it over or look the other way.

‘Please, Dora,’ said a small voice, ‘is this right?’

Dora looked up from the illustrated edition of White's ‘Selborne,’ in which she was secretly inscribing ‘Charles Ernest Merivale, from H. and D. V.,’ to inspect the embroidered card-case, manufactured by the little hands that held it out under her own immediate superintendence, and into every stitch they set Effie's whole soul had gone too with an earnest desire to

make it, if possible, ‘good enough for papa.’ Di had had her way—as anyone acquainted with her habits and character might have predicted she would have—and Effie had spent the last fortnight at Hurst Grange. It was to be hoped that the future Lady Campbell would always provide as well for the happiness of her stepdaughter as she had done when insisting upon this arrangement, for Effie was looking like a different child. If Dora had found her humble, grateful, and affectionate in no common degree, she had discovered that Dora was all sunshine and merry kindness; while Uncle John in his own unassisted person would have been sufficient to thaw a larger mountain of ice than any by which a poor little child-heart has ever yet felt itself oppressed; and the thought that she would soon have an acquired right to him as her own Uncle John, set the coming wedding in a brighter light before Effie’s eyes than it had ever yet worn. Charlie, too, was always friendly, and she was not *very* much afraid of Harold.

‘Take your twopenny-halfpenny rubbish out of a fellow’s way, do,’ remarked the last-named hero as, descending from a flight of steps by means of which he had been fixing a glittering star on the tree’s topmost spike, he nearly set his foot on various gossamer preparations—blue, pink, and golden—ranged on the floor

below. 'Why can't you hang your miserable curl-papers up and have done with them?'

'Because I am waiting for you or Charlie to get me some more pink ribbon.'

Charlie sprang up, glad to rush out into the winter sunshine, and having received his orders was on his way to the village shop in half a minute. It stood in the centre of the street, conspicuous as a village shop should be, with high steep roof and massive old chimneys, where starlings built and croaked amongst the ivy, that seemed to invest the whole place with an air of tranquillity and rural quietness. But appearances are often deceitful; and when Charlie came near '*Multum in parvo*'—as Mrs. Clack's storehouse was named at the Grange—voices the reverse of tranquil were to be heard through the open door.

'For shame, Master Tom, now! You as owes me four and ninepence a'ready—all through my good nature, as one may say—to want to be taking the bread out of an honest body's mouth like that—ha' done now!'

'Bread,' said a rough voice; 'who wants bread? Give me this, I say.'

Charlie knew the voice. It did not add to his desire of entering; but here only was pink ribbon to be had—so in he must go.

Before the counter, or rather stretched half over it, was a boy of about his own age, making

violent efforts to reach a tray full of Mrs. Clack's best toffy, which she was defending both with hands and tongue.

'For shame, you rude boy—and me a lone woman as you should be ashamed to cheat. La! Master Charlie,' with a most dramatic change of tone, 'how *do* you do, sir?' and down in an unguarded moment went the tempting tray within reach of the needy customer, who snatched several pieces, with a loud 'Hullo, Mother Clack, who's sold now?'

She hurried off the tray with a groan, while Charlie cried, indignantly, 'What are you up to now, Tom? Why can't you leave things alone when they're not yours?'

The boy gave a short laugh, then held out his prize to Charlie, with 'Have a bit?'

'Thank you! What I take I pay for.'

'So do I when I've got the tin, and when I haven't I just put it off till next time.'

'And when you can't pay, you should go without.'

'Yes; fine for you to talk of going without! How much breakfast did you go without this morning, I wonder?'

'Breakfast!' said Charlie, surprised.

'Ah! nothing you wanted, I'll be bound. *Mine* ain't a long bill, by any means; a couple of crusts, and the dregs of grandfather's teapot. Couldn't you fancy a little toffy after that?'

Why, I declare I could eat the turnips out of the fields, often !’

Charlie stood silent. Tom Barnes probably spoke the truth. All the village knew that he was but half fed, as well as half clothed, and more than half neglected, and many—the much-tried Mrs. Clack amongst them—would often spare a bit of their best for one whose wretched condition they pitied the more from his being ‘a gentleman born.’ There was not much about poor Tom to prove his right to the title. He was an orphan, with only one known relation in the world—an old grandfather, with whom he lived in a most dilapidated farmhouse, standing alone in fields between Hurst and Arnborough, the town not two miles distant. Old Mr. Matthews belonged to a class of men destined, it would seem, to be always rare, but never extinct; he was a miser. The village believed him to possess unknown hoards, while he always represented himself as in the depths of the extremest poverty, and had done nothing to discredit his own story, having lived in the same tumbledown house, and, as far as could be told, worn the same rusty coat as long as most of his neighbours could recollect. He was now nearer eighty than seventy years old, and to judge from his yellow withered face and creeping shambling gait, might have been anything up to a hundred. The story ran that he had long ago

made a large fortune in business, and had had a wife whom he had half starved to death. Certainly he had had a daughter, who, perhaps to escape a similar fate, had married an officer in the packet service.

If Captain Barnes flattered himself that he had made a prudent match, the result scarcely justified his hopes. With his wife at the time of their marriage he received not one farthing, and in seven years' time both were dead, leaving one unfortunate little boy to return to the wretched roof which his mother had been only too thankful to leave on any terms. Old Matthews, though he could not quite shut his doors against him, lamented loudly over this cruel expense, and had not the old woman who formed his entire household been gifted with rather more human feeling than her master, little Tom would really have run great risk of dying of want. It is certain that he would have grown up in total ignorance had not Mr. Merivale's unceasing arguments at last driven the old man to send him to the Arnborough grammar school, where a middling education and indifferent company might be had for a comparatively small sum, though never were a father's groans over his son's bills of four figures deeper than those uttered by Matthews over the small quarterly payments which seemed to break his heart regularly four times a year. When not in school, Tom was nearly sure to be consorting

with the least desirable boys in town or country, almost his only real friend being Mr. Merivale, who could not bear to think of anybody—especially any boy—in distress without trying to help them, and would from time to time indulge in visions as to the mode in which Tom's character was to be raised.

These benevolent schemes received no sympathy from Harold. With a boy's horror of any approach to vulgarity, he declared positively that it was not his mission to reform low cads, and that as Tom Barnes evidently preferred the society of the Arnborough market-place to any other, he felt no call to disturb his enjoyment. Harold forgot that Tom had no other society within his reach. Low cad though he might appear, he was keenly alive to any notice from his superiors. His nearest approach to a fixed principle was a wish to please the vicar of Hurst. On his representations he had more than once kept out of a row, and had at times been seen in Hurst church for several Sundays running. Tom was also capable of discerning and resenting the studied avoidance of his nephew, as well as the ceremonious manner Harold chose to assume if they chanced to meet. But Charlie was different, having as little idea of despising as of reforming Tom. A nice fellow he could not think him, yet he had pitied him from the bottom of his heart ever since hearing his uncle declare that he verily believed if that old Jew

of a grandfather would do his duty by the boy, he might be sending him off to Eton with them instead of letting him go to the dogs at Arnborough. The contrast was awful. It was impossible to think that any house at Eton would be improved by his company, yet equally impossible not to feel for the boy who missed such a life through his grandfather's cruelty only.

So Charlie had a reserved fund of compassion in his heart for Tom ; and now as he stood and gazed, compassion became something like compunction. His own breakfast ! It had been undeniably good. Could he possibly be a bloated young aristocrat, after all—a small but selfish monster ? Hunger ! Charlie had occasionally fancied himself acquainted with the feeling—in early morning school, for instance, or coming home from a long day's hunting ; but something seemed to say that Tom's experiences had been of a sterner character. It might be the appearance of the cheeks before him—they were much thinner and paler than his own, the lips had a hard expression, the dark eyes, though quick and intelligent, wore a shrewd precocious look which would seem to belong to the streets of East London rather than to a country village—while every glance and movement of Tom's recalled to mind the old song—

I care for nobody, no, not I,
And nobody cares for me.

Something or other there was that struck Charlie forcibly—all words of reproach died on his tongue—while for the first time sank deeply into his young mind the world-wide problem—that ‘riddle of the painful earth’—Who made thee to differ?

The difference was great. The eyes that met Tom’s keen, almost cunning glances were remarkable for open frankness and brightness of expression. Charles Merivale was a very handsome boy, with a remarkably good countenance, and he was unspoilt, having grown neither selfish nor conceited amongst the influences of his home. He had accepted all its pleasures and its freedom much as a peach-tree on a southern wall accepts the sun’s warmth to give it back in welcome fruit, while Tom might be compared to a similar tree planted in a cold climate and an unkind soil, little likely to come to perfection.

While Mrs. Clack hunted about for the pink ribbon, Charlie meditated, then stretched out his hand towards the particular department of the window dedicated to baking and confectionery, possessed himself of two substantial plum buns, and pushed them towards Tom.

‘Take those,’ he said; ‘that stuff’s no good at all if you’re hungry.’

‘And how about the coppers?’

‘Oh! I’ll take the buns, if you like to eat them.’

The speed with which Tom pounced upon them showed his perfect approval of this division of labour. Cramming one into his mouth, and the other into a ragged pocket, he followed Charlie when the latter left the shop, and the two boys walked up the street together, Tom, too well employed to speak; Charlie revolving in his mind a difficult and delicate problem. At last he said,—

‘Did you ever see a Christmas tree?’

Tom in the intervals of bun was understood to reply that they weren’t much in his line, but he believed he might have, in shop-windows.

‘We are to have ours to-night; my uncle gives everyone presents, you know.’

‘Does he? Wish he’d ask me,’ was Tom’s prompt reply.

Charlie felt embarrassed. This was not the point at which he had wished to arrive.

‘He couldn’t do that, I’m afraid. He has no one out of the house except quite the poor people.’

‘There’ll be none of them quite so poor as I am, I’ll be bound.’

‘Well, but what I meant,’ continued Charlie, colouring, ‘is that people do give presents at Christmas.’

‘Do they?’ said Tom. ‘Catch grandfather giving me a Christmas box.’

‘I wanted to do it,’ said Charlie. ‘Only, as I

haven't got anything particular—if you will take this, you can get what you like—a book, or anything, you know.'

He held out his hand with something in it, which Tom, to his amazement, perceived to be a half-sovereign, part of a benefaction which Charlie had that morning received from his father.

'What's all that about?' he asked, stopping short and staring hard at Charlie.

'You don't mind—do you?'

'I mind your giving me ten bob! But I suppose,' and Tom's sharp look returned in a moment, 'there's something you want me to do for you now?'

'No—nothing.'

'You want to give me that, just for nothing?'

'For a present—that's all.'

'Then'—as both hand and half-sovereign were seized in Tom's firm clutch—'you're an uncommon brick! But, I say, you don't really mean that about a book?'

'Oh no, get anything you like.'

Tom's mind was much relieved. 'Look here,' he said, as Charlie stopped at the garden gate, 'there isn't anything I *can* do for you, is there?'

'No, thank you—nothing.'

Tom would have been better pleased if there had been something. 'I say,' he said eagerly, 'won't you come up to the farm some day this week? There's such a jolly lot of rats in the barn:

the men will be moving the straw to-morrow, and if you'll bring a dog the next day, I'll get another, and we could have glorious fun.'

His look and manner were so eager that Charlie did not know how to refuse, so with a half promise they parted, and he climbed up the steep garden path, rejoicing in the thought that Tom need not be hungry again for some days to come. But Charlie had reckoned without his host, for Tom had in him the making of as thorough a young spendthrift as ever threw away a grandfather's hoards, and the half-sovereign came to an abrupt, if brilliant end that very evening in providing an entertainment for himself and a few choice spirits at an Arnborough public-house.

CHAPTER VI.

THE winter day was closing in that afternoon when the carriage from the Grange drew up at the Arnborough station, and before many minutes had passed two tall gentlemen, conspicuous above the crowd emerging from the station door, came forward in search of it. Sir Malcolm entered first and threw himself back upon the seat in silence; his brother, after seeing that the servant and luggage were safely following, did the same; then, as the carriage drove away, raised his hat from his head and passed his fingers through his hair with a sigh of satisfaction.

‘All right,’ he said, ‘at last.’

Sir Malcolm roused himself.

‘I am sure, Angus, I am infinitely obliged to you. You will excuse my having been such wretched company.’

His brother laughed.

‘Don’t mention it, my dear fellow, it is quite the proper thing. I excuse you everything in consideration of to-morrow.’

‘It is not of to-morrow—not only of to-

morrow—that I have been thinking,’ said Sir Malcolm with a sigh. Then, after a pause, ‘Angus, do you remember, thirteen years ago?’

Angus did perfectly remember, yet hesitated before answering.

‘Yes. I was almost too young for my office then. I hope I shall perform it better to-morrow.’

‘I saw no fault in you, or in anything else that day;’ and again Sir Malcolm leant back, lost in thought.

‘Well,’ said his brother kindly, ‘we must all heartily hope that to-morrow may be the beginning of as great and more lasting happiness.’

‘Thanks. Yes.’ But still Malcolm’s thoughts seemed far away from the present time, and soon he spoke again. ‘The other day, when I was at Glenarchie, to prepare for my return to it with Di, those days came back most wonderfully. Thirteen years ago—and then three years after——.’

‘Yes, poor fellow,’ said Angus, filling up the pause; ‘no one can deny that you have had many years of loneliness.’

‘I should have been very glad if I could have taken Di to the same home at once, if we could have gone north directly; but perhaps,’ with a resigned sigh, ‘under the circumstances, Paris may be the better place.’

‘*Much* better,’ was the unhesitating reply. ‘My dear Malcolm! take a bride to an empty house in the Highlands in the dead of winter! Pray, don’t let her even see the place till summer comes, if you want her to fancy it.’

‘That I know she will. *She* thought there was no place like it, and they are alike in so many ways.’

Angus turned his face to the window, thankful to the gathering darkness for hiding an irrepressible smile. Never to his mind had the world contained two more different creatures than the high-spirited Di Merivale and the gentle Effie Douglas, the graceful, fragile girl-bride as he recalled her on that June morning, thirteen years before, when he, a boy of sixteen, had hardly been able to keep pace on his pony with the happy young bridegroom as they rode together through the early morning mists over moor and mountain, to meet her at the nearest Episcopal church. How different would be the scene to-morrow! How different was the same man as he sat, shading his face with his hand, his heart divided between the past and the present; while if that dearly-loved and early-lost bride had any representative on earth, she would certainly be found, not in the dark-eyed beauty so soon to take her place, but in her own little daughter, now waiting and watching for the father who was her own still—till to-morrow!

Presently the horses slackened their pace, as though ascending a steep pitch, and Angus looked out to see what he might in the dim light.

‘What sort of place may we be coming to, I wonder,’ said he, ‘and what sort of people? It seems rather a leap in the dark. I got a line from Phil Merivale, saying we must come down by such a train, and shall be taken in all right at the Grange; but where or what the Grange may be, I don’t precisely know. However, we’ll hope the natives are friendly—this carriage looks like it!’

‘The Grange—Mr. Merivale—the clergyman uncle—don’t you know?’ was Malcolm’s explanation.

‘Clergyman uncle. Humph—and nest of clerical cousins, I suppose?’

‘Only two, I think; and, by the way, they are not cousins exactly, not Merivales—some other name—Vaughan.’

‘Vaughan! Ah! my pretty young lady, no doubt, who made me act as a vet. Is she a horsey individual in general, I wonder? She hardly looked it.’

‘They are the kindest people in the world,’ said Sir Malcolm, warmly; ‘Effie has been as happy as a queen among them.’

‘What! Effie is there! I knew she had been disposed of somehow; but you don’t mean

to say that shy little thing has been happy among a set of strangers?’

‘You should see her letters. There, that is the house.’ Sir Malcolm relapsed into silence while his brother examined with some curiosity so much of the place of their destination as could be seen by the aid of a lamp, which, placed over a deep porch, shed its light on stone mullions and ivied walls. The result was satisfactory.

‘An intensely respectable old place, I see; first cousin to the Hanger most likely. We shall do very well here, no doubt.’

If the outside of the Grange spoke of comfort, the welcome within more than kept the promise. No question on the subject could remain when the hall door had been thrown open, and its master’s figure with outstretched hand was seen standing in the flood of light that streamed out on the darkness. The first grasp was for Sir Malcolm, the second for Angus, with ‘Your brother, Campbell? I won’t tell him he’s welcome.’ It was needless, the tones were enough, and Mr. Campbell, entering the house, looked round well pleased on the long low hall, with its dark wainscot and roof, relieved by crimson curtains and rugs, while a wood fire burning on the stone hearth lit up the whole with a cheerful glowing light. Mr. Merivale, however, drew them on into the still warmer, brighter drawing-

room beyond, with renewed expressions of pleasure and hospitality. Sir Malcolm looked at once round the room ; it was empty.

‘ Looking for your little maid ? ’ said the vicar. ‘ Where can they all be, we must find them—shall I go ? Will you come ? ’

Sir Malcolm assented, and they followed their host as he crossed the hall and turned down a wide matted passage, where through a door at the end came such a chorus of laughter and merry voices that it was not wonderful if those within had been deaf to the sounds of their guests’ arrival.

‘ The schoolroom,’ explained Mr. Merivale as he opened the door ; ‘ here they are—the noisy children.’

The room was half dark, lighted only by a fire, which had been allowed to sink to a mass of glowing embers, for the benefit of a row of chestnuts, which decorated the top of the grate ; while the young workers were one and all resting from their labours in various attitudes of repose on the rug before it ; Effie with her head on Dora’s shoulder, Charlie stretched out at full length, endeavouring to persuade Snow the terrier that hot chestnuts would agree with his constitution, while Harry—his head on a cushion, his feet, it must be confessed, on the hob—was busy with Smut, the companion terrier, who, seated on his hind legs with patient

solemnity, was receiving as many warm morsels on the end of his little jet black nose as his tyrant could contrive to pile up, while addressing his victim and the company generally with lengthened quotations from Mrs. Gamp—that one fair creation of womankind who just now reigned supreme over Harold's fancy.

There was a general start at the opening door; Smut and Snow, scattering their chestnuts, barked in sudden alarm. Harold sprang up, flung a log on the fire, among indistinct mutterings that he wished to goodness his uncle wouldn't walk about like a cat,—the last animal to which Mr. Merivale's quick firm footfall could be properly compared; while Effie sprang into her father's arms with 'Papa! oh, papa! I never knew you were come.' Mr. Campbell, standing in the doorway, surveyed the group with an amused expression, and quickly decided, while his eyes rested on Dora bending over the hearth as she tried to raise a flickering blaze, that it was the prettiest fireside picture he had seen for a long time.

Lights were now brought, and she had to come forward at her uncle's call.

'I hope that Miss Vaughan will allow me to look on a formal introduction as unnecessary,' said Angus, with a pleasant smile. 'We are not quite strangers, though we met at rather an unfortunate moment.'

Dora blushed, and murmured an inaudible answer.

He turned to Harold. ‘We have met before too, I am sure—at Eton, wasn’t it?’

Harry assented.

‘Of course, directly I saw your face I felt a cold thrill, an inner consciousness you had bowled me out some time or other—don’t you remember it?’

‘I should think I did. Why, I was trying for the eleven, and you had just cut me for four, two balls running!’

Angus laughed, and proceeded to discover that Harold was now the captain of the eleven, who had disposed of most of the enemy’s wickets the preceding summer, and would undoubtedly have them all next time; the last comfortable article of faith being furnished by Charlie.

Meanwhile Sir Malcolm was pouring out on Dora what she thought entirely unnecessary gratitude on his daughter’s account. Effie’s visit had been a pleasure to them all; she could say so without any violence to truth, and echo the latter’s regrets at the prospect of the morrow’s parting, when Effie was to return to town with her aunt, Mrs. Scott, after the wedding should be over.

‘But I may come again in the summer, papa?’ said Effie, looking wistfully at her father.

‘I think we must rather beg for a visit from Miss Vaughan in return,’ answered Sir Malcolm. ‘Effie would be delighted to show you a Scotch mountain.’

Scotland! Dora’s eyes were answer enough, but such happiness seemed too unreal to be possible, and while Mr. Merivale carried off Sir Malcolm, with a charge to Harold to look after his brother, she stood motionless, lost in a delightful vision of lochs and mountains; Edinburgh and heather; Queen Mary and Sir Walter Scott—all conjured up between herself and the schoolroom door by their visitor’s single sentence. Awaking with a start, she looked round to see the awful Mr. Campbell comfortably warming himself at the fire, and apparently intending to stay where he was. This was very distressing. Ought she to say anything? What remark could she think of not wholly unfit for so tremendous a visitor? Perhaps it might be allowable to observe that he must have had a very cold journey. She ventured on a sentence to that effect. He confessed in return that a good fire was a welcome sight.

‘A polite hint,’ said Harry, ‘as anyone can see we’ve nearly let this one out. Where’s another log?’

‘Here,’ said Angus. ‘Oh! your leg, is it, Charlie? What a lazy fellow you are, to be sure.’

‘Lazy!’ retorted the again recumbent Char-

lie. 'I've worked like a horse all day, and now I'm not going to get up for anybody.'

'And are you now going to devour all those chestnuts? How fearfully ill you will be. Miss Vaughan, don't you think I shall be justified in appropriating a few—entirely for his own good, of course!' Without waiting for an answer Angus swept off half Charlie's hoard, and established himself in an arm-chair to enjoy them; his whole tone and manner showing the quiet ease of a man accustomed to do and say whatever pleased him most, confident that it could not fail to please others also. He rather hoped, indeed, that Dora might subside into her corner again,—perhaps even roast some more chestnuts for him. He was used to any amount of attention, and could have mentioned a little crowd of young ladies who would have burnt their fingers for him by the hour—but no, there she sat upright and demure on the chair before him, proper as a Puritan, silent as a statue.

Mr. Campbell, however, needed nobody's help to enable him to talk. He spoke of their journey, of the wedding, the guests, the church, and having extracted about half a dozen words of reply in the course of as many minutes, continued lightly, 'I have been making a discovery. Congratulations on these happy events being well over, should really be bestowed on the much-tried

relations, instead of the bride and bridegroom. The weight that Malcolm has been on my mind words cannot express; his general behaviour has been a cross between that of a sleep-walker and a maniac. Ladies on these occasions, I believe, take to tears and salts instead. Have you gone through a great deal in that way at the Hanger, Miss Vaughan ? ’

The solemn face before him relaxed a little. ‘No, Di hates salts, and I never saw her cry in all my life.’

‘You don’t say so ! What a sister I am to possess ! But then you can’t feel for me at all : my one earnest desire is to see him taken out of my hands at eleven o’clock to-morrow morning, and after that——’

‘The dressing bell ! ’ cried Dora in too joyful a tone to be perfectly polite, as she sprang from her chair with unfeigned relief ; then, checking herself, as a dim vision of what Phil would have said had he been asked to dress at that hour crossed her mind, added humbly, ‘It is only half-past five o’clock—an hour earlier than usual because of the tree, and we have to dine in the study, instead of the dining-room. I am very sorry ; I hope you and Sir Malcolm won’t mind it *much*.’

The tone of serious anxiety amused her guest not a little, as he answered gaily, ‘The

only thing I could possibly mind would be if anyone should put themselves the least out of the way on my account ; and as to Malcolm, pray be easy ! In his present state of mind you might take him to dine in the kitchen—and he would never find it out !’

CHAPTER VII.

Sieh, liebe Seel, vom Menschenleben soll
Der Baum mit Lust und Dorn ein Abbild sein :
Nah bei einander wohnen Freud und Leid,
Und was dein Leben süß und lieblich macht,
Und was noch schöner in der Ferne schwebt,
Du freust dich d'rauf, doch hängt es in dem Dorn.

HEBEL.

‘Oh, Goody, what a thing it is to be grown up!’

Dora sighed as she spoke, and threw herself down in a slightly ungrown-up attitude before the fire in her old friend’s room.

Miss Goode turned round from the looking-glass, in which she had been arranging the six tight little grey curls which had from time immemorial crowned her kind, squarish, motherly face, and inspected anxiously the disordered heap on the hearthrug.

‘My dear, you are tired; I told you how it would be if you insisted on working so hard, and with to-night and to-morrow both before you, why not leave more to the boys?’

Dora sighed again.

‘Dear, dear,’ continued her friend, ‘if your

uncle would only have changed the day ; but gentlemen—— However, my child, run away and dress—dinner may do you good.’

‘Dinner,’ cried Dora, ‘that will be dreadful.’

‘Not at all ; everything is quite right ; there will be——’

‘Oh, everything is right, of course, as you are here. Dear old Goody, I never was half thankful enough for you ; do come back, pray. I’m sure your brother doesn’t want you more than we do.’

A very loving caress accompanied the words, but though it was warmly returned, Miss Goode shook her head.

‘Only a few months, then, and I would be so good. I would go down every morning and meditate among the cold meat. Mrs. Sage tries to make me now, and I pretend—only I really *do* look out of the window.’

‘But, my dear, that is not the way to get on—a little endeavour—however, you need not be anxious for to-night ; all is settled.’

‘But people must talk,’ said Dora, ‘as well as eat—and that man is dreadful.’

Miss Goode looked puzzled.

‘What man do you mean?’

‘Mr. Campbell, of course.’

‘Sir Malcolm’s brother? Oh ! then, my dear, I think if I were you I would not say “man.”’

‘Oh, but you would, Goody, if you *were* me

and had seen him sitting in the arm-chair—your own chair—in the schoolroom, so comfortably, when he hadn't been in the house ten minutes, talking away about everything in the world; and I sat opposite too much frightened to think of a word to say. It was horrid; and I know he'll do it again at dinner, and I shall be so stupid. I never can bear any people who make me feel stupid.'

'You? But really'—Miss Goode cast about in her mind for some expression that should convey a proper amount of mild encouragement—'I should not say that you are, in an ordinary way, deficient in conversation.'

'You mean, Goody, that in an ordinary way I chatter very fast; but who could talk to such a creature as Mr. Campbell in an ordinary way? Directly I looked at him to-day I saw "first class" written over one eye, and "fine gentleman" over the other!'

'You saw them?' said Miss Goode, bewildered.

'Yes, Goody! Quite plain to be seen, in large round hand. Now do look for them yourself to-night.'

'My dear'—Miss Goode began fidgeting about the room—'it would be of no use. You know I never can see half the things that you can, and all I want now is to see you dressed for dinner; it is getting very late.'

Anyone might have wished to see that sight.

Dora's fresh young beauty was developing so fast that each little change in her adornments served to bring to light some hitherto unnoticed grace or prettiness. Even her uncle and brother could not help observing this, and manifested their approbation each in his own peculiar manner: Mr. Merivale by an intelligent nod and glance at Miss Goode, or any old friend who might happen to be present; Harold by hypercritical remarks on whatever flower or ribbon chanced to be his sister's favourite for the hour, though even he was sometimes puzzled to know what to blame in the simple attire from which she had never yet wished to depart. Miss Goode's face on these occasions was a sight to behold, her feelings being divided between strong delight in Dora's appearance and an equally strong desire that Dora herself should not on any account find it out. Beauty is vanity, no doubt, yet as she looked at the face and form which themselves adorned, rather than were adorned by, snowy muslin folds and dark blue ribbons, Miss Goode rejoiced in the conviction that if this dreaded Mr. Campbell could but use his eyes as well as his tongue, he would find the coming evening no great grievance.

The glance which he cast towards the head of the table as they took their seats in Mr. Merivale's study was perfectly satisfactory to Miss Goode, and if she would at first have wished

it to be prolonged, rather than that he should resolutely turn round in order to devote himself to her own entertainment, she was soon obliged to change her mind. Mr. Campbell was so exceedingly agreeable that it was impossible to wish that he should talk less.

Dora on her side had ample leisure to observe her formidable guest, as Sir Malcolm, by whom she sat, claimed but little of her attention. The outer man was suspicious. Mr. Campbell's method of brushing his hair and arranging his tie far too nearly resembled Phil's for her to be able to feel the least confidence in him. But when would Phil have taken as much trouble to talk to Miss Goode as though she had been the most fashionable of young ladies, or made her laugh three times before dinner was half over? Trouble, indeed, was not the right word, as a perfect ease of manner was one of Angus Campbell's great characteristics, and she soon found herself listening with much delight to the sparkling stream of talk that could touch on every subject and brighten all; it was pleasant also to one so proud and so fond of her uncle as she was to see the genuine interest taken by their agreeable guest in the shrewd remarks and genial temper of his host. The mere sight of the vicar's countenance was enough to warm most men's hearts; the kindly smile and merry glance, well known as its constant adornments, were no

delusive shows, but furnished a true index to the soul that lay within. He was a home-keeping clergyman, seldom absent from the parish and neighbourhood, where he was well versed in the family and personal histories of man, woman, and child, and on friendly terms with every dog—deserving of the name—besides. But his were no home-keeping wits; his good sense and judgment made him an authority among his neighbours both lay and clerical, and many a man when in distress or difficulty, in doubt or in debt, had found a visit to Hurst Grange go a long way towards getting him out of his troubles. Among his own flock Mr. Merivale was almost adored, and this was a red-letter night in the village. To finish all preparations for the feast the younger members of the party were obliged before long to return to the dining-room.

‘Let us be quick,’ said Dora, ‘they will soon be here. Harry, where are the lists? Has everything been brought in?’

‘I should hope so. Just look at the pile. But what is this with no name?’ He kicked over a substantial-looking parcel.

‘That—oh—something of Uncle John’s; leave it alone, and let us see that everyone’s is there.’

Tucking in her floating dress Dora ran about, arranging, directing, and rearranging till nothing but the lighting remained to be done. This was

the boys' business ; and as she steadied the steps up which Harold was mounting with a long wax taper in his hand, she heard a voice behind her saying, ' Shall I be hung from the tree as a spy ? Miss Goode encouraged me to venture, and really you must allow me to take your place ; that dress should not come near the tree.'

' Thank you,' said Dora, retreating ; ' but I was quite safe.'

' And I'll tell you what,' added Charlie, with fierce emphasis ; ' that dress deserves to be burnt, and the first time I can catch it without her in it, I'll do it ; it's disgraceful !'

' Disgraceful ! Why ?'

' To go about with that disgusting dark blue all over you. I can't think how you can do it.'

' Dark blue ! oh, is that it ? Well, Charlie, when I come to see you at Eton, it shall be in a complete suit of beautiful *sky*-blue.'

' Catch me walking about with you if you do,' was growled from the top of the ladder ; while Charlie cried, ' Keep it for Lord's, that will be jolly !'

' If Uncle John will take me.'

' Of course he will ; why, he must, as it's Harold's last time ! But mind you don't have a scrap of this horrid hideous thing anywhere near you.'

And Charlie gave a toss to the muslin skirts and their objectionable bows, intended for merry

sport, yet likely to turn to fatal earnest, as Dora was still standing near enough to the tree for a fold of her dress to fly over one of the lower branches on which Charlie himself had just lighted the tapers. In a moment he saw the light muslin close to the flame, and with a cry of horror had tried to seize and disentangle it. His haste, however, only brought down fresh tapers to increase the danger, which might have been terrible had not another and firmer hand interposed, and gathered up the white folds so quickly and skilfully that Dora could draw back instantly, and, as it proved, unhurt. All passed in such a few moments that she had hardly time for the sensation of fear, and was surprised to hear a slight trembling in her own voice as she tried to say lightly, 'Why, Charlie, I thought you were going to wait till I was out of it?'

Poor Charlie stood the picture of dismay. 'Oh Dora!' he cried, 'you are not hurt? You are sure you are not hurt?'

His terrified face and tone brought a more real conviction to her mind of the danger through which she had passed in that half-minute. Harold had rushed down his ladder and was standing by her side, quite silent; but, if such a thing had been possible, she could almost have believed that his strong brown fingers trembled a little as they took up the dress which he bent down to examine. And there were some

dark eyes looking into hers—eyes in which she did not see anything written now but anxiety and thankfulness; and she heard Mr. Campbell's voice saying in quite a new, grave tone, 'Miss Vaughan, thank God, you are safe; but pray be careful.'

'Yes,' she said, in an awestruck tone. 'Then, looking up, added earnestly, 'And thank you, Mr. Campbell.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Harold, 'it's a mercy you were here. Charlie, were you mad, to do such a thing?'

'I don't know; I didn't think it was so near,' said the contrite Charlie.

'Think, then, next time, and don't play those insane tricks again.'

'He won't,' said Dora eagerly. 'Don't mind me; let us put things right at once.'

But the others interposed between her and the tree. 'Not a step nearer,' said Angus.

'Then I will go and set my dress right; the people must come in directly now the tapers are lighted. And, Mr. Campbell, I think, please, we won't tell them of this just now in the drawing-room, because it would frighten them; but'—a bright shy colour flushed her face—'I want to thank you again very much.'

'Put that off, too, pray,' he answered with a friendly smile as he held open the door, and she ran to her own room.

In three minutes she returned, looking rather paler than usual, and seemed not unwilling to take the seat Mr. Campbell offered her at a little distance from the crowd of villagers who now were pouring in at the lower end of the room and surrounding the brilliant pyramid of light and colour—a crowd which it was the vicar's good will and pleasure unconsciously to increase from year to year.

‘Is not Mr. Merivale's household rather extensive?’ asked their guest, laughing; ‘or is it miraculously expanded about Christmas time?’

‘The household! Oh, surely you don't suppose all these people are our servants?’

‘I was meditating, Miss Vaughan. I was considering what domestic functions were likely to be performed by those old ladies in the mob caps and black bonnets, for I am sure your uncle told me it was just a little household festivity.’

‘He thinks so,’ said Dora, demurely; ‘but then, you know, there are so many other people who of course must be asked.’

‘Are there?’

‘Oh yes! the almshouse people, and some of the school children, and the choir, and the old widows; and—oh, a great many more.’

‘I understand. What a nice thing to be an old widow, and live at Hurst. Won't you point out some of these worthies to me?’

‘ You will see them all if you come. I must speak to them now.’

For a little while her white dress was nearly hidden among the red cloaks and smock frocks, while she greeted their wearers with a simple sweet warmth that had long made ‘ our own young lady ’ much beloved in the village. Emerging at last, she took her place at the head of the school children, to lead the Christmas carols that were always sung as they stood in a circle round the tree.

Then came the distribution of the presents, and now the vicar was seen in his glory while, with a face and tone as joyous as those of Father Christmas himself, he read aloud the names from a list nearly as long as his arm, adding appropriate remarks as Harold and Charlie brought forward the gifts allotted to each.

“ Dame Harris ”—pair of spectacles—pack of nonsense—sees as well as I do ! but she asked for them, so give ’em, Dora, give ’em ; but it’s all vanity, Dame Harris ; you think they’re becoming, that’s what it is ! Now then, “ Master Stubbs ”—warm waistcoat. You won’t fill that yet awhile, Stubbs ; why, I declare it would hold a man’s wife and family as well as himself ! “ Mrs. Horner ”—flannel. Now, Mary Horner, let me see you make that flannel into petticoats, and wear them, and don’t waste it on those thirteen babies of yours. Ah ! I know your bad

ways. "Jack Deacon"—ornamented pipe—that's Mr. Harry's choice, Jack, and if I were you I'd make him ornament it inside with that Turkish tobacco of his'—*et cetera—et cetera*—for who would not be witty when every jest is received with broad grins, to be carried home and treasured up as one of the best parts of the Christmas present? Well was Mr. Merivale known to his people as 'such a merry-hearted gentleman;' other laudatory adjectives would be often and deservedly affixed to his name as the year rolled on, but this was the one that always came into general use for some weeks after the annual party. When the presents had all been distributed, the tree itself had still to be stripped of its sugared fruits, until the morning work was so effectually undone that Harry declared he did not believe old Matthews himself would be able to pick off another sugar-plum.

There were, however, still a good number of packages, containing their own particular presents to each other, untouched, and when the village guests had filed off to enjoy the substantial supper awaiting them below, these were presented and opened amidst much excitement and merriment. Effie, who had hardly left her father's side all night, felt that the proudest moment of her life had come when he assured her that the little case was the most wel-

come Christmas gift he had ever received, and listened to his whispered prophecies of future happiness in store for them both, with a fervent hope that they might yet be fulfilled. Certainly there was comfort in thinking not only of Uncle John himself but also of Dora, Harold, and Charlie, who would now all be like cousins in everything but the name. But who so proud as Harold himself when out of the parcel which he contemptuously kicked over two hours before emerged his uncle's present, a scarlet hunting-coat, long the secret object of Harry's ambition—one of the things which he thought 'the old fellows in Chancery,' if they insisted on taking a man's money away from him, should at least make it their particular care to provide him with? Dignity was for once forgotten in delight as he rushed away to array himself in his new treasure, and returned looking so handsome and happy that Dora's heart bounded at the sight; but, alas! only to sink the lower when her uncle, striking him on the shoulder, said, 'Ah! my boy, it has only come just in time to be valued; you'll have another red coat soon, twice as fine as this, to strut in.'

Angus had been watching the face of sisterly pride, and he now saw the instant change of countenance with which Dora turned away and, crossing the room, began diligently to fold up papers and string at a distance. He followed,

under pretence of assisting in this sudden fit of order.

‘So your brother is going into the army?’ he said. ‘Has that been long a settled thing?’

‘Yes.’ As the word came out, Dora’s lips shut tightly as though closed by a spring. She was making a strong silent resolution that nothing in the world should tempt her to complain of Harry to a stranger.

‘Indeed! I could imagine him just fit for the profession.’

This was rather too much, and her cheeks flamed as she answered indignantly, ‘I don’t know why you should say that. Harold is very clever.’

‘I beg your pardon, but I never meant to doubt it,’ said he, amazed and amused.

‘I thought you said he was just fit to be a soldier.’

‘Yes; quick and active and resolute. I never dreamt of insinuating that a soldier should be stupid, of course.’

She was silent.

‘You don’t think so yourself, surely?’

Still no answer—till she turned hastily from his questioning gaze and cried, ‘I don’t know. I don’t know anything. I don’t want to talk about it.’

‘I beg your pardon—I did not mean to be inquisitive.’

‘Oh no!’ and she turned round again, reproaching herself for haste and ingratitude. ‘Everybody knows, and I oughtn’t to mind if he likes it.’

‘But you are unwilling to part from him?’

‘Yes, indeed.’

‘Well; as an only brother, that is very comprehensible. But why not make him go into the Guards? A very safe and easy form of soldiering.’

‘The Guards! Why, Phil is in the Guards!’ And Dora looked unutterable things.

‘Merivale—very true.’

‘And they do nothing—nothing at all. Oh, I hope Harry will never go into them.’

‘Despise Her Majesty’s own body-guard, Miss Vaughan! What unusual treason in a lady! Then at least your brother need never leave England.’

‘No; but he had better go.’ She heaved a deep long sigh. ‘Oh, why does anyone ever want to be a soldier?’

‘Well, you know, glory and danger are rather exciting things in their way.’

‘Yes; but there is no danger now, and I cannot see any glory in wearing a uniform first in one place and then in another.’

‘Indeed! Excuse me, but there is more both to do and to learn than you seem to imagine.’

‘But it doesn’t take a clever person. Any-

body can do it, and Harry is so clever. If he had only gone to Oxford I am *sure* he could have got a first.'

The compliment to her companion was all unconscious; her thoughts were with Harold only.

'His talents need not be lost in the army. Try to believe he will be a second Wellington. Why do you object so much to officers?'

'Because'—and her thoughts flew back to specimens of the profession visible from time to time at the Hanger—'they always seem so tiresome and so—frivolous.'

It was impossible not to smile at such a sweeping verdict proceeding from such very young lips.

'*All?*' he inquired.

'All that we have seen.'

'I think I could show you a few exceptions.'

'Perhaps so; but their pursuits are frivolous, at any rate.'

'Do you call the Peninsular war frivolous?'

'But that is quite a different thing. There are no wars now; nobody fights. It is all empty show; that is why I think it is so wretched to be a soldier.'

'Ah! now I see. I was quite puzzled. I could not believe you would be a member of the peace party. Now I quite understand; it

is an excess of warlike zeal, not its absence, that makes you object to your brother being a soldier.'

'Well, if I were one myself, of course I should want to fight.'

'Of course. Nothing but a rising of the masses or a regular European war would make the life endurable. And why should we despair so long as Chartists and Frenchmen survive?'

He spoke lightly; but Dora could not answer with a smile—her trouble was too deep to be jested away. Besides, they were being called to follow the others to the supper-room below to listen to the toasts and speeches which were making the guests merry in the lower regions. This was always a lively and often a highly entertaining part of the evening, and the vicar's guests, well aware that they would not find themselves seated in front of so many good things until Christmas came round again, were apt to make it a long one with the aid of songs, sentiments, and speeches. To-night Dora felt unable to be as much amused as usual. The thought of the danger she had passed through, and of her late conversation, dwelt on her mind, and she was glad when at length they returned to the drawing-room, there to wait, according to custom, until the midnight chimes should tell them that a new year was born. It was not far off now, as the Vicar threw a fresh log on the

fire and all gathered round the cheerful blaze, —all, that is, but Sir Malcolm, who had vanished some time ago. Presently Dora stole away from the circle, and, passing behind the curtains of the oriel window, softly unbarred a shutter to look out upon the midnight sky. She gazed in silence, losing herself in dreams as to what might have befallen her that very night had it not been for the help of the stranger whose presence she had dreaded. They were grateful thoughts that went up to the stars and pierced beyond them. But thought soon flew forward into the coming year, less on her own account than on her brother's. What would it bring him : would he be far away before it had ended ? She sighed ; and at the same moment Harold's arm was round her. Dora drew it closer as she felt his kiss on her cheek and knew to what cause the unusual grace was owing.

‘All right, Dormouse ?’

‘Yes, Harry, quite ; but I've been thinking how easily I might have been all wrong if Mr. Campbell had not been there.’

‘We ought to be much obliged to him, and that's a fact,’ said Harry decidedly.

Dora held her brother's arm more tightly. ‘I've been thinking about you too, Harry, and the new year ; it will be a very new one to you.’

‘To be sure. I shall have left Eton.’

‘And become a soldier. Oh! where will you be this time next year?’

‘Why, here, most likely, on this very spot. I shall hardly have got my commission, or have joined, at any rate, so don’t cry out before you’re hurt.’

‘No,’ she sighed, ‘I won’t; and perhaps in *some* ways it may not be quite so bad as I have thought.’

‘As bad as you have thought! I should think not, silly little girl. There,’ and Harry kissed his sister with a hearty though rough tenderness. ‘A happy new year to you, and more sense.’ For the bells were pealing from the distant tower, and a chorus of good wishes was going round the room. Last of all to Dora that night came this one: ‘You will allow a stranger to wish you a happy new year, Miss Vaughan, and not think him too bold in hoping that before it is much older he will not be reckoned as a stranger any longer.’

CHAPTER VIII.

THE sun shone out and all went well on Diana Merivale's wedding-day. The little church below the hill was so crowded with guests and neighbours that it was difficult for Sir Philip to pass between them as he led his daughter to the altar rails, where the bridegroom and his brother awaited them—the one pale and grave, the other so smiling and so happy that anybody might have supposed he was the one about to step forth and take his place beside the handsome blooming bride, who, easy and self-possessed, conducted herself to perfection on the occasion. Her clear decided answers were audible in the farthest corners of the building; it was with a bright smile that she turned to receive her mother's tearful embrace; and when—her hand on her husband's arm—Lady Campbell, 'in gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls,' followed his example and bent down to bestow a gracious kiss on Effie, the happy family tableau might be considered complete.

Effie, indeed, was not forgotten by her father

during the whole day. He called for her as he took his seat at the breakfast-table, and she had to quit the protection of Dora's side and go to him, utterly shamefaced at the unexpected honour thus publicly thrust upon her. The table, long though it was, could not furnish seats for quite all the guests at once, and Dora, half-way between a visitor and a daughter of the house, found herself unprovided for in either capacity. Nothing unwilling, however, she retired with Charlie to a window-seat in the hall, where they agreed to sit in peace while others ate, and then go in and have a comfortable little meal together. Harold had already been seen, with a face not unlike that of a caged lion, conducting onwards one of the young lady guests, and just as they were laughing at his tragic mien, Charlie, to his horror, found himself pounced on by a relentless elder sister, and sent off on a similar errand.

'Mind, I shan't eat a scrap till you come in,' were his last words as he departed, leaving Dora in her loneliness to forget, if she could, that she was rather dull and very hungry, and that it would have been much more amusing to see and hear all that was going on at the wedding breakfast.

'What—Lady Cecilia! Oh, it's only Dora. 'Pon my honour, I took you for Cecilia Langley in that cloak,' and an exquisite being dropped

into the chair beside her. 'Well, you're best off here in the quiet.'

'The dining-room,' remarked Dora, glancing at the new comer with no particular pleasure, 'is full.'

'I should rather think so—a perfect black-hole! Well, if my father won't build he must take the consequences. At least five years ago did I tell him that room ought to be enlarged.'

'Build on to the Hanger!' cried Dora scandalised. 'Why, Phil, it would spoil the whole place! and the dining-room is more than thirty feet long.'

'My dear child, you know nothing about it. Every house I go into has a dining-room twice the size. Here,' to a passing footman, 'bring me something, will you—some soup and champagne—not that flat stuff,' as a glass was handed to him, 'get a fresh bottle, can't you?' And leaning languidly back, with his feet on the window-seat, Phil proceeded to refresh exhausted nature, until he was so far invigorated as to be able to favour Dora again.

'Where's that idle Charlie?'

'Doing his brother's duties.'

'Much obliged; not if I know it! There was Angus Campbell coolly supposing I should make a speech—bridesmaids' health, or some such utter weariness. My good fellow, I said, I

really am past that sort— Here, Smith, lobster salad and more champagne. Better ask Harold Vaughan, I said, he's last from school. By-the-way, isn't Harry going to leave that little establishment?'

Dora was too young to be amused by Phil's airs; she was simply and deeply indignant.

'You *know*,' she said impatiently, 'that he leaves in the summer to go into the army.'

'Ah! the line—so I've heard; but 'pon my honour, I'd forgotten exactly. You can't conceive what a memory I have. How some men contrive to remember all their own concerns even passes my comprehension! Such a bore to be always thinking what you've got to do! Only last autumn there were the Langleys and Lady John, each vowing and declaring I'd promised to go to them the same day. I left them to fight it out—and, on my word, I forget which of the two I went to now.'

'So do they, I dare say,' Dora longed to answer. Phil was always exasperating; but most of all when he leant back with that ineffable air of languid affectation. His impoliteness in offering her none of his own meal she hardly even remarked—it was so common a specimen of 'Phil's manners'—but his pretended ignorance about Harry was an offence not to be forgiven, and she sat on in much inward wrath, making the shortest possible answers

and longing for the moment of release. It was pleasant to see the dining-room door open and several of her scarlet and white sisters issuing forth, as now there were good hopes that Phil would expend his eloquence elsewhere. Theirs, however, was first to be exerted.

‘Captain Merivale—how shameful! Miss Vaughan, how *can* you encourage him, sitting there in that indolent way when he ought to have been making all sorts of pretty speeches upon us. Yes, indeed, Captain Merivale, I don’t know what would have happened if Mr. Campbell had not taken pity on us and made, oh, the most delightful speech! Ah! there he is. Mr. Campbell, you must really come and be thanked—more than thanked—rewarded—see what I am going to do for you,’ and the fair speaker began searching in her bouquet of red and white camellias for its most exquisitely shaped bud, while Mr. Campbell protested and disclaimed, ‘Might he never have a harder cause to plead.’

‘Ah! but you must take it, though I know it will spoil my poor dear bouquet; and then let no man say again there is no gratitude in woman-kind.’

With an air of bewitching graciousness the bud was extracted and presented; and as the other bridesmaids saw no reason why one of their number should monopolise all the grati-

tude or all the generosity to herself Angus soon found himself in the possession of a handful of white or crimson buds, every one of the givers indulging, perhaps, in a secret hope that *her* flower would be raised to the honour of ornamenting his button-hole. If so, all were disappointed, and they soon turned again to begin a fresh attack upon the unmoved Phil.

One bridesmaid alone had taken no part in the floral shower that had descended upon Angus. Through some mistake a short number of bouquets had been provided. Dora therefore carried in her hand only two or three half-open roses which Charlie had brought her from the Hanger conservatories, and Mr. Campbell's eye glanced more than once from the bright parti-coloured bouquets and their fashionable-looking owners to the slight girlish form leaning tranquilly back in the panelled window-seat, the roses lying on her lap between her folded hands.

He stepped up to her with his handful of camellias. 'Miss Vaughan,' he began, 'I feel dreadfully like Aladdin's Princess, who, when she had had everything else showered upon her undeserving shoulders could not be satisfied without the roc's egg.'

It was spoken under his breath, and Dora looked up, waiting for more.

'May I not carry away one rose—some tiny

bud—in memory of having had the high honour of proposing your health to-day?’

‘My flowers,’ said she, unconsciously holding them tighter, ‘do you want them? Charlie brought them to me this morning.’

‘As a peace-offering, was it? But surely you and he may spare me one flower, or I shall be afraid you did not approve of my flowers of oratory.’

‘I did not hear them. I have been sitting here all the time you have been at breakfast.’

‘Her!—oh, I wondered—having a little private feast with Merivale. But what possible right had he to keep a whole bridesmaid all to himself—greedy fellow!’

‘Not with him.’ Dora’s tone was even more emphatic than the shake of her head. ‘Charlie is coming for me. I am going into the dining-room when there is room.’

‘You have had nothing? How dreadful! What shameful neglect! Pray come this moment, Miss Vaughan, or we shall have a paragraph in the papers of “Distressing Intelligence—A bridesmaid starved to death.”’

He offered his arm.

‘Thank you—but Charlie will be here directly. I need not trouble you.’

‘It is quite impossible for me to leave you unfed, Miss Vaughan.’

Dora seemed perverse. 'He would miss me if I moved. I would rather wait.'

He was not accustomed to take 'no' from any lady, and had no intention of doing so now. Slightly bending towards her, he said in a lower tone, 'Last night you were good enough to think you owed me some thanks. May I claim my reward to-day?'

Again he offered his arm. She rose instantly and took it, turning upon him her full bright gaze.

'Indeed, Mr. Campbell, if you ask me for *that* reason, I must do it, if it were a much harder thing.'

'Thank you, very much. I shall remember that, Miss Vaughan.'

Charlie, appearing in the dining-room door, proved to have been in the act of seeking Dora, and she sat down to the half-emptied table between her two supporters, who seemed anxious to provide the best of everything as refreshment to her mind as well as her body; Mr. Campbell rehearsing for her especial benefit all the wedding speeches, not omitting his own much admired discourse on bridesmaids, and making everything so amusing that there could be little doubt the *réchauffé* was even better than the original dish. When he once more claimed a rosebud it was readily granted. Why should she not give it? People always liked flowers in London, and this was a very pretty one.

Very—and that was no doubt the reason why, though the camellias lay forgotten in the railway carriage which conveyed Mr. Campbell back to town, the little rosebud was still safe in his button-hole when he stepped out of his hansom that evening at the Temple gates.

CHAPTER IX.

Art thou a child of tears,
Cradled in want and woe,
And seems it hard thy vernal years
Few vernal joys can show?

J. KEBLE.

WAS Tom Barnes's invitation to be accepted? This was the question that troubled Charlie's mind the moment he opened his eyes the next morning. There were *pros* and *cons*. *Pros*—First, Tom wanted him to go. Secondly, it was a rat-hunt. *Cons*—First, Harold couldn't bear Tom. Secondly, he didn't much like him himself. But this last *con*, after a little reflection, seemed to be changing its character and turning into a *pro*. He did not much like Tom, certainly, but ought perhaps to be the more kind to him on that account. Charlie's conscience would not let him be quite easy in disliking a boy who was so nearly friendless and so often hungry. Then Harold need know nothing about the matter if it were got over quickly. He and Dora were engaged to ride over to the Ansteys—neighbours who lived seven miles away—that day to luncheon, and Charlie considered that this would be a favourable opportunity for

keeping his own half promise made two days ago. The house was still full of guests, but he stole away unnoticed soon after breakfast, and, mounted upon some miserable substitute for the never-sufficiently-to-be-lamented Pixie, took his way towards the ragged little lane, used by few and mended by nobody, which led to Stone Farm, the dilapidated abode of Matthews the miser.

Had Charlie not been prepared for the sight, he might have supposed himself to be approaching a ruin. Not only did fallen palings, and a garden overgrown with nettles, meet his view, but the building itself—once a small farmhouse—seemed altogether abandoned to decay. It was difficult to imagine that any human being could be found behind those broken windows and desolate walls, nor was there a single sight or sound to dispel this idea. No face looked out, no voice was heard, and when Charlie, turning a corner, came in front of the house, he felt as though he must indeed be visiting the dwelling of the dead. Not a single lower window on this side was left without such protection as the miserable broken shutters were able to afford. All were barred—closely as any prison—and the one worm-eaten door afforded neither knocker nor bell by means of which a visitor might announce his arrival. The end of his stick, however, served Charlie as

well. But at first he knocked in vain ; the dull, hollow echoes that belong to a deserted house seemed likely to be his only answer. By-and-by, however, a shrill, quavering voice was heard within, apparently calling to some second inhabitant ; steps approached, and after much clanking and clattering, the old door, secured by a chain within, opened to the extent of nearly three inches, and a woman's gruff voice demanded who was there. Charlie replied by giving his name and asking for Master Tom.

‘It’s a trick, a trick !’ repeated the shrill voice in an audible whisper, ‘a trick, Lyddy—don’t let him in—put up the chain again, Lyddy. Woman, are you mad?’ These last words were uttered in a louder and more desperate tone, as the door, opening completely, gave Charlie a view of two people within.

The first was a woman, old, ugly, and dirty—very dirty, Charlie thought her—until, stepping aside, she revealed another figure, by whose side her dirtiness became comparative cleanliness. It was commonly reported in Hurst that the only additions Matthews’s wardrobe ever received were contributed by the various scarecrows he encountered in his walks, and as his present visitor’s eyes fell on him, he for the first time believed the report. A thing that had once been of cloth, and might have been a coat, was in some places buttoned, in others secured by

string, round his miserably thin, bent figure; beneath its tattered flaps hung down another rag or two, supposed to represent a waistcoat, his costume being finished by patchwork small clothes, stockings of different colours, a slipper and a boot. The only attempt at uniformity was to be found in the general coating of dirt which time and use had impartially distributed over every one of these extraordinary garments. His face was worse than his clothes, dirtier it could not be—though it rivalled them even in this particular—its prevailing hue resembling that of yellow parchment long forgotten in the dust of ages, while out of two deep cavities peered a pair of eyes, which, though now bleared with age, might once have been as dark and as sharp as those of Tom himself.

Charlie involuntarily stepped back in disgust, while the old, cracked voice was repeating—‘Put up the chain, Lyddy, the chain, or we shall both be robbed and murdered.’

‘Have done, I tell you,’ scolded the old woman in return, ‘it’s the young master from the Hanger.’

‘You don’t know me, Mr. Matthews,’ said Charlie, trying to recover himself into civility, ‘I am Charles Merivale; I came to see your grandson.’

‘Master Merivale—young Master Merivale—dear, dear, to think I should have made such a

mistake ! But it's a wicked world, Master Merivale, and I'm a poor old man ; but if you will be pleased to come inside my poor place, I shall be honoured ; yes, sir, I shall be honoured—honoured'—and he advanced, mumbling and mouthing, till Charlie, much alarmed lest he should be meditating a shaking of hands, immediately busied himself with fastening his pony to the least rotten post he could find, and then, wishing himself miles away, followed his host, who, on turning round, had exhibited a scene of personal dilapidation even more amazing than the front view, down a dark passage, into a back room, dirty, dingy, and miserably bare of furniture, the only thing that could possibly come under the head of an article of luxury being the short black pipe—Matthews's single piece of extravagance—that lay upon the table.

'Take a chair, sir, if you will condescend,' said Matthews. *The* chair would have been the more correct expression, as, besides his own three-cornered seat, there was but one rush-bottomed chair to be seen, which Lyddy brought forward, and then departed in search of Tom.

'Ah ! take the seat ; it's all I have to offer, Master Merivale ; I'm a very poor old man.'

'I—I won't sit down, thank you ; I was going out with Tom,' answered Charlie, who heartily wished himself farther off.

'Ah ! Tom's out ; he's always out.'

‘I dare say he is,’ and Charlie glanced round the room.

‘Except at meals, Master Merivale—always comes in to them—reg’lar, reg’lar,—never catch him out *then*. Ah! dear, dear,’ and Matthews rocked himself backwards and forwards as he groaned over this trait in his grandson’s character, ‘he’ll bring me to ruin. No one would believe what that boy costs me. Ah! Master Merivale, it’s a terrible thing to be so poor. I’ve a hard matter to get a bit of tobacco for my pipe sometimes’—here he stretched out his hand for his one friend—‘and nobody gives a pinch to a poor old man.’ Here he looked hard at his young guest, whose countenance was not encouraging; then, edging himself nearer and nearer, began again, with a whine like a professional beggar: ‘But Tom’s a poor orphan, and we mustn’t be hard on him—Oh, no! We mustn’t be hard on him—and I say, my dear young gentleman’—here he peered into Charlie’s face with his old ferret-like eyes, and laid a skinny hand on the sleeve of his jacket—‘you haven’t got another you could spare him, have you? or a waistcoat, or a pair of trousers? for he’s bad off for clothes, he is indeed, my dear young master, and I can’t buy him any. Oh! no, no—oh *dear* no!’

‘That’s a lie, then; you might get me as good as his, any day,’ cried a voice at the open

window ; and Tom, who had approached it unperceived, now swung himself up and dropped down inside as nimbly as a cat, hardly waiting to reach the ground before he began again : ‘How dare you ? how dare you go begging old clothes of a fellow who comes to see me as a friend ? You old beggarly wretch ! Here, Merivale, this way,’ and without waiting for a word he opened the door and rushed down the passage. With a hasty ‘Good morning !’ Charlie seized his hat and followed him, thankful to find himself once more in the open air, in company with the pony and Pincher the terrier, both of whom at that moment appeared to stand considerably higher in creation’s scale than the miserable object he had left behind him.

Tom had a dark cloud on his face. ‘There’s a nice old man for you,’ he began, in a tone of indescribable bitterness ; ‘a proper, respectable, old cove to have for your grandfather, he is ; begs his visitors’ clothes off their backs, and says it’s for me ! Me ! And if you had given him any, what would he have done ? Gone down and sold ’em in the market-place at Arnborough, to-morrow.’

‘Not really !’

‘Carried ’em down himself, with all the brats in the place shouting “Old Rags !” at his heels. They tried it on with me, with “Young Rags,” once—not twice, I promise you.’ Here Tom

squared his elbows in a suggestive fashion. 'Well,' and he turned round upon his visitor, 'so you've come; I didn't believe you would.'

'Why not?'

'Folks ain't over and above fond of coming here, and no wonder! But it's all right as you *have* come. Here, give us that pony.'

He led the way to a tumbledown outhouse, where the pony could be secured, then turned his attention to Pincher. 'You've brought a dog, that's right! If I'd known you were coming I could have borrowed another; but this is a good one, I'll be bound.'

'First-rate,' said Charlie eagerly.

'Then we can have a go in at the beggars, there are lots of 'em in the barn; the men were moving the straw only yesterday.'

The barn and farm buildings stood at some distance from the house, and were in much better repair than anything else on the premises, for Matthews let them with his land to a neighbouring farmer, who insisted on their being kept weather-tight. The barn had lately been more than half emptied of its contents, and was in a promising state as regarded rats, who had increased in peace and plenty and grown fat on their neighbours' corn for many months past. But a day of vengeance had arrived, for now the fray began, and was continued throughout the

morning with great spirit on the part of their enemies. Neither of the boys were new to the business, and Pincher proved himself a very hero in the fight, dashing about amongst the loose straw, now here, now there, his whereabouts being generally indicated only by the spasmodic action of the black tip of his tail, accompanied with short, sharp barks of extreme satisfaction, expressive of the fierce joys of battle. It was a cold, bright day, well fitted for hard work, and Barnes and his guest did their parts manfully, growing excellent friends over various exciting chases, till by mutual consent they flung themselves down to rest upon a truss of straw while the indefatigable Pincher pursued the sport on his own private account.

‘What a lot we’ve killed,’ said Charlie, surveying the battlefield. ‘What’s to be done with them?’

‘Oh! the men will get rid of them in the morning; they’re glad enough to have them killed down. Or, look here, shall I send ’em in to grandfather, and ask if he wouldn’t like some rat-pie? I’ll tell you what he did eat once—part of a fish that a rat had been gnawing at, and left on the bank down by the Abbot’s pool. Grandfather found it, and carried it home and cooked it for dinner—ugh!’

‘I wonder it didn’t poison him.’

‘ Good job if it had ; but, I say, what’s that dog got ? ’

‘ Only a bone. Here, Pincher, leave it, sir ! ’

‘ ’Tisn’t a bone,’ and Tom jumped up briskly. ‘ Whatever— Why, look here—I say, my eyes ! ’

Charlie obeyed, and for a few moments both the boys stood motionless with astonishment. That dirty white lump under Pincher’s nose was in truth no bone, but a rag tightly knotted together, yet not so tightly but that the dog’s sharp teeth had made an entrance large enough for its contents to be seen—bright, yellow, glittering ; yes, and golden, for it was a real sovereign that rolled out of the shapeless little packet and deposited itself at Tom’s very feet. With one smothered exclamation he was on his knees, rescuing the precious rag from Pincher’s mouth, while Charlie, breathless with eagerness, leant over his shoulder, gazing at the money as if it were fairy gold that must vanish away with a touch. But no, they were real, substantial coins—sovereigns every one of them. And, oh ! what a number. The boys thought them endless, as with wondering exclamations they extracted them one by one from their hiding-place, and, sweeping off the straw, ranged the treasure in little piles on the floor. Then came the counting. Five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty ! till Tom, springing up in the air, and flinging

his cap to the very roof, cried out, 'Hurrah! a cool hundred, I'll be bound. Hurrah! old boy, for once in your life you've done me a good turn.'

Charlie looked up rather astonished, in the midst of his other astonishment, at this mode of address.

'I!' he said, 'I had nothing to do with it.'

'You? No, to be sure; but now let's see where he found it.'

Following the direction of some disturbed straw, Tom's quick eye fell on a little hole beneath some steps leading up to a granary. Inserting the end of his stick he worked it about till a loose brick was displaced, and a small cavity appeared, into which he peeped anxiously. It was empty; only a fragment of rag sticking between two bricks remained to show that this had been the hiding-place.

'Ah!' said Tom, snapping his fingers triumphantly, 'didn't he think he'd gone and hidden it well, the cunning old rat!'

'What? Who?' inquired Charlie innocently, his eyes turning from the corpses of a whole army of cunning old rats on the one side, to Tom's significant gestures on the other, without coming one step nearer to a comprehension of the matter. 'You don't think a rat hid it there?'

‘Don’t I though! A rat with two legs! *Grandfather*, to be sure!’

‘What—did he hide that money?’

‘Of course he did. Who else would have done it?’

Charlie’s face lengthened. ‘What a bore!’ he said, ‘I hoped it had been there for ever so long! Now he must have it back again.’

Tom stared at his visitor for a moment as though the latter had lost his senses, then, throwing himself down on a truss of straw, burst into a long loud laugh, not in the least understood by Charlie.

‘What makes you laugh like that?’ he asked.

‘Wouldn’t you like to see me,’ said Tom, recovering himself a little—‘walking in with that money, and giving it to grandfather?’

‘Yes,’ said Charlie boldly, ‘I should; because it would be the only honest thing to do.’

‘And saying, “Here, grandfather, you’ve none of your own; here’s a little present for you.” And wouldn’t he grab at it, just!’

‘But you must, if it’s his own.’

‘Must I?—thank’ee; we’ll see about that. You may be green enough for anything, but I’m not. No! that money’s mine—except what’s yours. You shall have what you like for yourself. I’ll go shares fair enough.’

‘I!’ And the tone might have shown Tom that there was something besides ‘greenness’ in

his companion's character. 'I take money that belongs to someone else! You don't know what you're saying.'

'It's you that don't know,' returned Tom. 'You don't know grandfather. Now, supposing I did give him that money, what do you think he'd do with it?'

'I can't tell that.'

'No, but I can! Dig another hole and bury it to-night.'

'Would he—are you sure?'

'Yes; and by next week have forgotten where he'd put it, perhaps. Lyddy knows he hides money, and she guesses that often he don't remember where it is. She's tried times and times to find out herself, that she might give it to me. Now let's see the dates of this.'

None of the sovereigns bore a date within the last ten years.

'There now,' he cried; 'ten years, maybe, that's been there, and what for? Who's the better? And you'd have me give it back, that it might go down some other hole to-night, when there's many a day I haven't half a dinner, nor Lyddy either; and as to clothes——'

He shrugged his shoulders again, and cast an expressive glance down his own person as if that were argument enough.

Charlie was silent, the question was becoming perplexing.

‘You see,’ pursued Tom, ‘’tisn’t as if he were like other folk. You wouldn’t give it to a madman, and he is mad—as cracked as an old cup! He gives me nothing. If it wasn’t that Lyddy, poor old soul, does all she can, I declare I often shouldn’t have a rag or a crust. Now here’s a chance for me to get some of the things he ought to get us, and never does, and you’d have me give it all up. But it’s easy talking for those that never know what it is to want.’

This was a sure shaft. Charlie’s eyes were at once turned on Tom with sincerest pity, and everything but his poverty and loneliness was forgotten.

‘I know it is,’ he said; ‘I know that—it does seem a pity.’

‘More than a pity, I can tell you, to throw all that money to the rats again; you’d think so, too, if you wanted a dinner as often as I do.’

‘Yes; and yet’—Charlie’s colour rose—‘it would be a greater pity to take what doesn’t belong to you.’

‘That,’ said Tom, in a surly tone, ‘is my look out.’

‘But it’s mine, too—we found it together.’

‘Well, take what you like—haven’t I said so?’

‘And I told you I won’t touch it; it would be absolute stealing in me, and so it must be the same for you.’

‘Stealing? I like that!’ cried Tom, his eyes flashing as he jumped up and stood astride over his treasure.

‘You needn’t be afraid,’ said Charlie indignantly. ‘I’m not going to touch it; I don’t want to be a——’ He stopped.

‘A what?’ demanded Tom, fiercely. ‘A thief, you mean. How dare you call me that!’ and out came an angry oath.

Charlie grew crimson. ‘Since you talk like that, I shall go. Good day.’ The next moment he had swung himself over the low barn door, and was gone.

Tom had not expected this; his first impulse was to rush after him, but pride checked the movement. He laughed, he called him a sucking innocent, but the laugh was forced, the words died on his lips. He looked round, he was alone—alone with his riches, and he sat down on the floor to count them. It was a hundred pounds exactly; what a prize for one who hardly ever had possessed a hundred pence! Tom filled his hand with them, let them slip through his fingers into the other hand, grasped them as if to be sure they were there, then looked round once more—and sighed. Yes, he was alone, as usual. There were his grandfather and Lyddy in the house, there were the boys in the Arnborough market-place — this was his choice of companionship. He got up, and,

walking over to the further side of the barn, stood looking out at its other door, his hands sunk deeply in his trousers pockets, trying to whistle, in vain. Why was it in vain? What had become of his late delight in the gold still lying on the floor behind him? Tom was beginning to find out, as others have found out in their turn, that something more than money is needed to make money precious. He had material wants, many and great, poor boy, but he had other wants, wants he had hardly believed in till now; but all at once he seemed to have discovered that these were the greater of the two. Five minutes ago he had had a companion, the prospect of perhaps a real friend. Now he had—his gold. Could gold speak with him, laugh with him, listen to him, feel for him? Someone had done this in a way of which he now felt the full charm. Such a companion as Charlie had never come across his path before; he knew it, for he was neither dull nor unimpressionable. His temper was ungoverned, his principles unformed, his manners and habits no better than might have been expected from his bringing up, but he had feelings not yet blunted, occasional aspirations after some different life to the one he seemed compelled to lead. And here had been a fellow who might have helped him towards it—who had been good to him, generous, compassionate. What had he done

to this friend? Sworn at him, and sent him away!

‘What a born fool I am,’ muttered Tom, between his teeth. ‘He’ll never come near this place again, I’ll warrant.’

The straw rustled as he spoke. He turned. Charlie was behind him. Tom’s face shone, he could not help it, as Charlie began—

‘Look here, Tom, I’ve come back. I’ve been thinking of something—let us go to my uncle.’

Tom stood mute.

‘You see,’ continued Charlie, ‘I’ve been thinking that what you say is true; your grandfather isn’t like other people, and yet I can’t feel sure that it would be right to take his money either, but Uncle John will know.’

‘And if he says I’m to give it back?’

‘I don’t think he will, quite. I don’t know what he’ll say; but I’m sure he’s the best person to ask. Do come!’

‘You want to make me a soft idiot, do you?’ growled Tom, his jealous temper returning in a moment.

‘No, I don’t! I don’t want to make you anything; only to advise you as a friend.’

‘A friend! You mean that—really, now?’

‘Yes, of course I do.’

‘Here goes then.’

Without more words Tom strode back to the

money, gathered it in his hands, and poured it into the handkerchief which Charlie held out to receive it ; then, unloosing the pony, they took the road to Hurst Grange, walking side by side, Charlie with the pony's rein over his arm, Tom with the handkerchief and its contents clasped between his hands, and Pincher, that most unconscious of agents, dreaming probably of rat-hunts to come, following at their heels. Tom's heart failed him sorely when the Grange appeared in sight ; not that he regretted his agreement, but, little used as he was to gentlemen's houses, an unconquerable fit of shyness overpowered him, and, had it not been for his companion's presence, he would probably have turned round and gone back again. Charlie, however, led him on through the stable-yard, in at a side door, and straight into the study itself, where they found the Vicar comfortably reading in his arm-chair, Snow and Smut at his feet. He looked up at the boys' entrance.

‘ Ah, Charlie ! What, and Tom Barnes, too ! How are you, my boy ? ’

At that kind, ready grasp of his hand, half of Tom's surly shyness vanished. But he was silent, and it was Charlie who, seizing the money and holding it out, dashed breathlessly into the subject.

‘ Uncle John, here's a hundred pounds ; we found it in the barn.’

‘Barn—a hundred pounds—what barn?’

‘Tom’s—his grandfather’s—it was rat-hunting, Uncle John.’

‘My good fellow, what in the world are you talking about?’

Charlie took a long breath, and repeated his tale a little more coherently. The Vicar leant back in his chair and listened, not a little interested and amused.

‘Capital, capital! So this is what you two boys call rat-hunting? Good sport this, Tom—eh?’

‘Oh! then,’ cried Charlie, ‘he *may* keep them?’

‘Keep them? Why, no. Didn’t you say they were his grandfather’s?’

‘Yes—*once*,’ said Charlie, looking wistfully from the knotted handkerchief on the table to Tom’s thin face, and then into his uncle’s eyes.

‘Once! Then when did they cease to be his?’

‘Come along,’ growled Tom, pulling at his elbow; ‘I knew what he’d say well enough.’

‘And I know what I’ll say,’ cried Charlie, twisting himself away. ‘They oughtn’t to be his, Uncle John—he doesn’t use his money well—’ and before any remonstrance could stop him, out came the whole history of Tom’s needs and wrongs and privations. The Vicar’s cheerful countenance changed as he listened.

‘What, is it as bad as that, my boy?’ said he, turning to his silent pale-faced young visitor. ‘You should have come to me before, Tom. Are there many days when you absolutely have not had food enough?’

Tom nodded. ‘As often as not,’ he said doggedly.

‘You don’t say so! On my honour, I should like to make an example of the old rascal.’

‘Then, Uncle John——’ and Charlie looked eagerly in his uncle’s face.

‘Ah—the money—that’s awkward; but he shan’t have it back; on my word, he shan’t! Now, let’s see—let’s see.’

The Vicar rubbed his hair in meditation; the two boys waited in anxious silence.

‘I know! I’ve an idea. I see! Charlie, run out and tell them to saddle Dumpling. Tom, you and I will go back to Stone Farm at once.’

Back they went, after the Vicar had taken care that for to-day, at least, Tom should be hungry no more, Charlie accompanying them at his own particular request.

How his uncle meant to act, the latter did not know, but so great was his confidence in Uncle John that his anticipations were most cheerful. He tried to impart them to his companion when, on reaching Stone Farm, Mr. Merivale went into the house, leaving the boys outside.

‘It will be all right, I know,’ he kept on repeating ; ‘just see if it isn’t.’

‘Nobody ever got a farthing out of grandfather yet,’ was Tom’s one reply ; to which Charlie as constantly answered, ‘Trust to Uncle John.’

His faith was not in vain. Mr. Merivale knew the man with whom he had to deal, and called to his aid the only ally likely to be useful—that powerful agent, fear. When the old miser heard that a secret hoard had been discovered, alarm as well as rage awoke in his soul. To the Vicar’s reproaches respecting his cruel neglect of Tom, he turned the deafest of ears ; but when a threat was held out that to-day’s story should be disclosed, and all the neighbourhood know that money was hidden about the place, then he trembled in his old slippers. He moaned, wrung his hands, endeavoured in vain to shake the Vicar’s resolution, and, finally, in abject terror, consented to give up the hundred pounds in order to secure a promise of secrecy.—‘Until, Mr. Matthews,’ said the latter, ‘this sum has been properly spent for Tom’s benefit ; and then I shall certainly come upon you for more. I shall keep it in my own hands, and shall show you and him by-and-by an account of the way in which it has been expended. Then you will give me another hundred. These are the only conditions on which I shall be silent.’

Matthews bewailed himself, and protested in vain. The Vicar went off as steward of the hundred pounds, which were still safely locked up in his own study drawer.

‘So now, my boy,’ he said, when he told the welcome tale to his two delighted companions, ‘I’m your treasurer, and you must tell me what you’re most in need of. Come to me to-morrow morning and we will talk it over.’

Tom tried to speak his thanks—but they seemed to stick in his throat, as he looked first in the Vicar’s benevolent face, and then at Charlie’s beaming countenance.

‘Thankye,’ he said, at last, ‘you’re very good. I never had a friend before, that I know of.’

‘A friend—ah, that’s what we all want—can’t do without it, any one of us! Well, we will see that you are not left friendless any longer, never fear. And now good-bye, my boy, and God bless you!’

CHAPTER X.

We come from playgrounds smooth and true
And chalked above the gravel ;
We gird our waists with belts of blue,
And up to ' Lord's ' we travel.

Two eager faces were gazing from the window of a house in Grosvenor Square early one August morning. A cab well laden with luggage drove to the door, and the faces vanished, to reappear at the open door, through which the Vicar of Hurst and his niece were entering.

' Dora ! Uncle John ! have you seen the score ? ' was the simultaneous cry from Charlie and Effie, while the latter was bestowing the warmest of greetings on her guest.

' To be sure,' and a broadsheet was flourished in their faces. ' What do you suppose we've been reading all the way up ? Ah, good match, good match ! forty-four runs, upon my word, a good score ! '

Sir Malcolm and Di now appeared, and the welcomes began anew, Sir Malcolm's being especially addressed to Dora, who had accompanied her uncle on this Saturday morning for

the double purpose of a visit to Lord's and that she might be ready to start with the Campbells on Monday, to begin the long-looked-for Scotch visit. But though the land of enchantment was so nearly in sight, yet to-day Dora could scarcely find a thought to bestow upon it, so absorbed was she by the intense interest of her first visit to Lord's, where she was to see her brother in all his glory as captain of his side, so excited by the delightful 'forty-four' that stood after Harold's name in the first day's account of the match, to be read, as his sister proudly reflected, wherever civilisation and the daily papers should have made their way.

Harold was off already to the ground, and the others were to follow in the carriage, which Di had made over to their use for the day. Nor were Dora and Effie to be left unprotected, for there, in her best bonnet and tightest curls, stood a well-known, welcome form—Miss Goode. Poor Miss Goode! Her friends in general might say it was very hard that the widowed brother, who had insisted upon having her as a house-keeper, should have married again and turned her out with so little warning, but the Campbells would have found it difficult to agree with them. Di considered it a happy dispensation, as it enabled her to engage Miss Goode to be Effie's governess, and Effie herself felt her great good fortune in securing a friend so closely connected

with her beloved Hurst Grange, and all whom it contained.

As the carriage entered the crowded cricket-ground Dora held her breath with excitement. Was it possible that Harold was one of those white figures on which such multitudes of eager eyes were turned. And oh, wonderful! could that exulting cry now running round the ground be intended to do honour to his bowling? Charlie said so, and she supposed it must be true. This was fame indeed. She turned her happy gaze on the solid ring of human beings surrounding the scene. Lowest down came the small boys, shrieking unintelligible chaff. Then appeared a row of faces, young and old, grave and gay, all—even the coachmen on the boxes—leaning forward, animated apparently by one common absorbing interest—the issue of the conflict in which Harold was a foremost champion.

‘Oh, Charlie! isn’t it delightful?’ she exclaimed, as the carriage drew up into position; and Charlie, descending from the box, came to establish himself on the step beside her.

‘Delightful? delightful? Ninety runs and only five wickets down! call that delightful?’ and Charlie fingered his bow, which looked not unlike a light-blue satin dahlia, and glared on all comers who had dared to hoist a different colour in a moody and resentful frame of mind. ‘There

was nothing very delightful in having the other fellows a hundred runs on, that he could see. Going to be beaten? *No, indeed!* What could put such nonsense into anyone's head? As if Eton were ever likely to be beaten! as if they couldn't lick those fellows to shivers any day of the year! though they *did* coach up like mad with about a dozen professionals, and though they *were* as old as the hills, most of them, and ought to have left years ago; and they would have whiskers, too, if they hadn't taken uncommonly good care to shave them off—oh yes! he knew it for a fact—and lots of other fellows at Eton knew it, too, he could tell them that!'

But nothing Charlie could tell anybody, whether fact or fancy, had the least power to damp Dora's spirits. Her face was all sunshine beneath the forget-me-not wreath in her white bonnet, chosen for Eton's sake, but whose blue was hardly soft or deep enough to match the bright young eyes which nothing could turn from that all-absorbing field where it was unspeakably strange and interesting to watch Harry's well-known movements. Now he was, with a commanding gesture, waving his field into a new position, now he was fielding himself—and no one else, she was sure, could have stopped *that* ball—and now, oh! now, he was going to bowl, and most eagerly did her eyes follow every ball of every over with intelligent approbation;

for there had been a time when even Harold had owned that, 'just by way of practice, and to keep a fellow's eye in,' Dora's own bowling was better than nothing; and this was not so long ago but that she could still appreciate and criticise in a way that was perfectly marvellous to Effie.

The dinner-hour came only too soon, especially as Harold at once vanished with the rest into the pavilion, instead of coming to bestow that greeting for which she would willingly have given her share of the luncheon which Miss Goode was now arranging for their benefit. When this was over, the ground, which had rapidly emptied as soon as people had leisure to remember that they were hungry, seemed to become fuller again than ever, and the buzz, the crowd, the general eagerness increased every minute. At last the white flannels appeared once more, and though Harold seemed to have not a moment to bestow upon Dora, it was sufficient for her happiness to be able to watch him with loving admiration on his pinnacle of schoolboy greatness as he moved slowly across the ground, surrounded, like a planet among its satellites, by the other white shirts, and the favoured few who thought themselves entitled to confer with the captain respecting a change of bowling or rearrangement of fields. She watched them crowding round him, listening to the words of wisdom with respectful attention, and could have

kissed two very diminutive specimens of young Eton who cried out, 'Vaughan's got the ball—hurrah!' right under the carriage door.

Dora's happy moment came at last. When the enemy's last wicket had fallen before Harold's powerful artillery, when the ground was ringing with cheers and with cries of 'Well bowled, Vaughan!' out he came with his honours thick upon him, and this time to her—yes, straight to her. How the spectators jumped up to level their opera-glasses at him, with audible whispers of 'That's Vaughan, the Eton captain!' How they opened before his steady stride as he came nearer with an air of well-meant indifference, yet a half smile on his glowing face, which showed that Harold the magnificent was still a mortal and a schoolboy! And now the glances turned towards the Campbells' carriage as, laughing, he tossed the ball into his sister's lap, with 'There's a present for you, Dormouse;' and when, throwing off his cap, he shook back his light-brown hair, and swung himself up to a seat beside her, it was not wonderful if many thought the ground could hardly furnish a pleasanter picture.

Such a thought was at least written with tolerable distinctness on the face of one gentleman now standing by the carriage door; but Dora did not see it, she saw and heard nothing but her brother, till Miss Goode touched her hand,

with ‘My dear, Mr. Campbell is waiting to speak to you.’

Dora turned a beaming face—she had not seen him since the wedding—but hardly remembered to shake hands now.

‘Oh, Mr. Campbell, did you see him bowl?’ she cried. Mr. Campbell expressed much regret in arriving too late for the gratifying spectacle. ‘But he has to go in, you know, so you will see him get his runs.’

‘Or his duck,’ said the hero himself, as he stroked an invisible moustache.

‘I am prepared for a hundred, Miss Vaughan. Here are a pair of new gloves, expressly intended to be destroyed in his service.’

‘A hundred? Oh! but he *may* not get so much.’

‘Indeed,’ said Harry, ‘you have discovered that?’

‘They are coming out again,’ shouted Charlie from his perch on the carriage-box.

So they were, and no more light conversation could be allowed. Sir Malcolm and Uncle John now joined them, and all watched together the opening of Eton’s innings, Dora leaning over Harold’s shoulder, when after a short visit to the pavilion he returned bat in hand and stood by the carriage door, calmly self-possessed amidst the surrounding excitement, as becomes a general in the midst of battle. She was far too much

interested to observe that Sir Malcolm, after a low conversation, had led his brother away ; but when the first wicket fell, and she turned her eyes for a moment from the field, she saw them talking to a lady and gentleman on horseback at a little distance. The gentleman was grey and elderly, the lady young, and, as Dora thought, exceedingly handsome, and she almost forgot to ask Harry the name of the next player, so charmed was she by that Grecian profile and pure complexion, whose delicate whiteness was set off by hair, eyebrows, and lashes of a raven blackness. The eyes she could not see ; they were turned downward upon Mr. Campbell as he stood by her horse's side. The expression of the face was grave, almost sad ; but this only added to Dora's interest in the unknown lady, which would have been still further increased could she have heard the conversation that passed between the two brothers when they raised their hats and moved away together.

‘ You are satisfied now, I hope ? ’ was Mr. Campbell's remark.

‘ Certainly. You have done the proper thing.’

‘ Entirely to please you.’

‘ You may be commonly civil to old acquaintance and friends in order to please yourself, I should hope.’

‘ That's all very well, old boy, but haven't

you been given away often enough yourself by Mrs. Grundy, to know that you are sometimes obliged to avoid your friends, however old—or young?’

‘By no means. Behave as if nothing had been said, and all is well. It is cutting people that has an awkward look.’

‘Ah! you are a bad hypocrite, and you know it, too.’ Sir Malcolm bit his lip to hide a smile. ‘And a worse matchmaker. Take my advice, don’t go in for the business till Effie comes out, and then, if you are a wise man, leave it to Di.’

‘Well, if Miss Sinclare has no reason——’

‘Never mind Miss Sinclare—when can you take me in at Glenarchie?’

‘Any time,’ said Sir Malcolm heartily, ‘so that you behave yourself.’

‘What a respectable old bore you are growing, to be sure! Then I’ll turn up somewhere about the 12th,’ and he went back to the carriage, there to be severely questioned by Charlie in the next interval of the game as to his possible motives in going to speak to a man in a dark blue handkerchief.

‘The handkerchief was a coincidence, Charlie, depend upon it. Colonel Sinclare is not the man to wear any colours but Her Majesty’s, and his daughter said they had no especial interest in the game.’

‘Really?’ cried Dora. ‘Poor thing! has she no brothers?’

‘None, nor any sister. Consequently, Miss Vaughan, not exactly deserving of your epithet. Far from being poor, Miss St. Clare Sinclare is a great heiress, and greatly admired.’

‘Oh, yes! she must be; she is so beautiful. But why has she the same name twice over?’

‘Given by her father, no doubt, on the principle that you cannot have too much of a good thing, and a better thing than his own name and family, I suppose, Colonel Sinclare is convinced nowhere exists on the face of the whole earth.’

Dora was quite ready to admit that no name could be too perfect for Miss Sinclare, while Harry breathed a savage hope that the future sharer of Miss Sinclare’s fortune might be either a Grubbe or a Snooks, ‘just to take down the old fellow’s conceit.’

‘Oh, Harry, how dreadful! Only imagine—St. Clare Snooks!’

‘Well, why not? There’s “Plantagenet Potts” at my tutor’s.’

‘She is much too beautiful ever to be a Snooks! A very common, commonplace name is such a great misfortune.’

‘Miss Vaughan—Miss Vaughan!’ and Mr. Campbell held up his hands in horror. ‘Spare my feelings—and poor unfortunate Effie’s.’

‘Why, what did I say?’

‘That commonplace names are great misfortunes, quite forgetting that there are two sad sufferers present.’

‘But,’ said she in astonishment, ‘Campbell is a beautiful name, and not at all common.’

‘Not common! Ah! Effie, Effie, what shall we do to keep her out of Scotland? What will she say when she makes acquaintance with all the butchers, bakers, and candlestick-makers in Argyleshire?’

‘They can never make me think it one bit less beautiful.’

‘Not when you have found there is a corner of the world where it is the inevitable lot of man to be “just ane Cawmil,” probably “ane Awngus Cawmil” into the bargain? Grubbes and Snooks’s would be distinguished exceptions there, I assure you.’

No, Dora was convinced that nothing could make her think the name anything but grand and beautiful, growing, to the secret amusement of her pretended antagonist, most earnest in the controversy, and bringing forward Argyle, Mac-Callummore, and Campbell the poet as names that might outweigh every butcher and baker in Scotland, till Miss Goode found it necessary to feel a little chilly and require Dora’s assistance in raising her shawl. What effect this well-meant device might have had cannot be

known, for at that moment an unexpected casualty at the wickets called Harold from her side. This was enough to blot the whole Campbell clan, present company included, from Dora's mind in an instant. With a beating heart she watched her brother walk towards the wickets; but when he settled himself, square and strong, to receive the first ball—that perilous ball, fatal to so many hopes and stumps!—she could look no longer, and, sinking back in her seat, closed her eyes as a confused noise of cheers and shouts ran around the ground.

‘Oh, Charlie!’ she sighed faintly, ‘is he out?’

Charlie was too busy among the cheerers to answer her, but Angus said gaily, ‘Nothing is out but the ball, and that is out of the ground. Don’t be alarmed, pray, everything is sure to go well after such a beginning.’

Most happily, he proved a true prophet. Seen from a light-blue point of view, everything did indeed go more than well; while Harold’s forward drives, and square-leg hits, called forth cheer after cheer from the spectators, and excited the Campbell carriage to such a degree that Miss Goode herself might have been heard hurraing with delight. Mr. Campbell kept close beside them, his light-blue predilections seemed best satisfied by contemplating at his leisure a forget-me-not wreath and the very fair face beneath it. Never had it looked fairer or hap-

pier than now, as, with glowing eyes and cheeks, Dora kept turning to him again and again to claim his sympathy and admiration for some wonderful hit or splendid piece of defence. He was neither clever nor fashionable in her eyes now ; he was only just a friend who could understand, appreciate, and explain all the good points in Harold's really fine play. She looked, listened, learnt, and found him and everything else perfectly delightful while the happy hours lasted.

But alas ! the brightest suns must set. One loose ball, loosely hit—a chance given—a catch made—and Harold's bat drooped idly from his hand at last, never to be wielded on that field again in the good cause of Eton ! Now, in the midst of the shouts and deafening applause that arose on both sides, it was Mr. Campbell's business to persuade his companion that there was nothing to regret, that to be caught at long-leg with such a hard hit could be guarded against by nobody : it was a glorious end, a noble death ! Dora hardly seemed to hear him. She sat perfectly still, her grave gaze following Harold as he slowly walked towards the pavilion, his bat across his shoulder. When he disappeared within it, surrounded by an excited crowd, her eyes turned, and, as they met Mr. Campbell's, he saw that a mist was gathering in them.

‘ You are not disappointed ? ’ he said. ‘ You

had not set your heart on three figures? A score of seventy-five! surely that must satisfy you?’

‘Oh, yes—but,’ and her voice sank, ‘it’s all over now.’

‘Over? yes; but there must be an end to everything, you know. To be captain of the Eton eleven for ever would be too much happiness for mortal man,’ answered Angus, smiling.

She coloured, half ashamed; yet there was something in the kind inquiring look now meeting hers which impelled her to speak again.

‘It is the end of Eton for him; the end of our having him at home for certain. He will go now, that is what I mean; what I felt all at once when I saw that boy catch the ball.’

‘Ah—you are thinking of the future.’

‘Yes; he must be a soldier now.’

‘And you will live to be proud of him as such, I don’t doubt. Let us take to-day’s success as prophetic—an omen of laurels to come!’

She smiled, promised to try, and was ready to welcome Harold back when he reappeared arm in arm with Uncle John, who could scarcely have looked a prouder man had Harry been already a Wellington returning from a Waterloo. She watched with them until the match was ended, and soon forgot the future in the present, in the joy of seeing Harold’s side victorious, and himself, as a conclusion to the whole, seized on by furious

friends and borne on their shoulders in triumph. Then came various good-byes and good wishes, and, above all, the necessity of a hurried parting from their uncle, who was forced to hasten to his train. Never, for more than a fortnight at the utmost, had she yet been parted from this kindest of uncles since the day he had rescued her from the dreary Brighton school. How wrong to be so happy at the thought of Scotland, when Uncle John would have to be left lonely for a whole six weeks! If he could but have come with them, and Miss Goode also, Dora felt she would have had nothing left to wish for. But Uncle John must stay at home with his duties, and Miss Goode must take her well-earned holiday. The northern party must start without them, and as it would comprise Sir Malcolm, Di, Effie, Harold, Charlie, and herself, Dora wisely reflected that there were enough for happiness if not for perfection, and prepared herself for as near an approach to entire bliss as this world was ever likely to afford her.

She went to her old friend's room on the following night to enjoy one last talk over all that was to be done; and when at length she rose, and took up her candle, Miss Goode still seemed unwilling to let her go.

‘There is just one little thing more, my dear,’ she said.

Dora put down the candle again and pre-

pared for some final caution against damp feet or over-fatigue.

‘I thought I would remind you—in case—supposing Mr. Campbell should speak of his own name again, it might perhaps be as well not to praise it quite so much.’ Dora looked astonished. ‘I mean, not in such exceedingly warm terms, because,’ Miss Goode hesitated a good deal, ‘one never knows ; it is impossible to tell exactly what a gentleman may fancy.’

‘What could he possibly fancy, excepting the truth—that I do like it very much?’

‘You said, you know, that it was beautiful.’

‘So it is—at least I think so ; don’t you, Goody?’

‘Oh, my dear child, how can it signify what I think?’

‘Just as much as what I do ; and I recollect quite well how you admired it when Di was going to be married. Don’t you like it as well now?’

‘Yes, certainly, certainly—it is not that at all. All I mean is that I should not like you to appear—what shall I call it?—too eager in your expressions to a stranger.’

‘Oh, but I don’t call Mr. Campbell a stranger now ; and we shall see so much of him at Glenarchie. Six weeks ! Oh ! Goody, we are really to be six whole weeks in Scotland !’

‘You are, indeed ; and I can hardly help

wishing——’ Miss Goode paused as she looked at the happy, innocent face before her; at the motherless girl for whom she felt almost a mother’s love.

‘What is it you wish, Goody?’

‘That I could be going with you, my dearest child—only that; and now we must really say good-night.’

CHAPTER XI.

‘Land of the mountain and the flood.’

A BRIGHT August day was drawing to its close as the sun sank behind the purple peaks that kept guard around Glenarchie. One side of the valley was vanishing into shadow, while the opposite crags glowed beneath the slanting beams in lilac and golden glory. Glenarchie Castle stood forth in dark relief against the radiant sky, raising its head amidst masses of solemn pine and rustling birch, which clothed the mountain side, the lowest trees bending in picturesque outline above their own reflection in the transparent waters of the loch. It possessed every beauty that a highland loch can boast of, excepting that of size—a deficiency that was a merit in the eyes of those who dwelt beside it. In the heart of some of Scotland’s grandest scenery, little Loch Archie might sleep in peace, and mirror more than one of her most famous Bens on its tranquil surface, safe alike from the invading tourist’s chatter or the steamer’s desecrating furrow. Neither sound nor sight was there on this summer evening to mar the absolute

harmony of the scene, the one perfecting touch of human interest and motion amidst Nature's silent magnificence being given by a little boat slowly making its way towards the Castle landing-place. From its snowy sail and crimson cushion two long lines of white and red descended into the crystal water, while distant sounds of an oar and a song came up delightfully through the evening stillness.

Sir Malcolm Campbell watched its approach as he leant upon the stone balustrade of the garden terrace overhanging the loch, but it was with a look of little satisfaction. Presently he turned away to the seat at the end of the terrace, where Di was reposing, buried in a book.

‘ See, Di,’ he said, ‘ look there.’

She raised her eyes. ‘ Well, what is it?’

‘ Did not Angus say he should be fishing with the boys at the Red Tarn?’

‘ I dare say he did.’

‘ And now I see him in the boat again with Dora and Effie.’

‘ I dare say. They went out with Simon an hour ago, and have picked Angus up somewhere, no doubt.’

‘ But, Di, I am anxious.’

‘ So am I—to finish this book. Now, Malcolm, try, do try, to take things easily. It answers so much better.’

With a gay, arch look she settled herself to her book once more, and her husband, after standing a moment in silence, turned back along the stretch of blue pebbles—all that Glenarchie could offer by way of a gravel walk—and resumed his former station. To take life easily is as difficult to some as it is natural to others. In Sir Malcolm's case it appeared to be an impossibility. So strong was his tendency to look on the mournful rather than the hopeful side of life, that when one cause of apprehension or distress was removed he generally turned round in unconscious search for another. Had he been a small-minded or ill-tempered man, this disposition must have made him a very unpleasant companion; but as it chiefly appeared in an over-anxious care for other people's welfare, Di only found in it a matter for a jest. Her own temperament was in this respect totally unlike her husband's. She frequently failed even to perceive the questions that were agitating his mind. When on the morning after their arrival at Glenarchie he had led her before the portrait of his first wife, which still hung in the library, and begged in a voice full of suppressed emotion to be told without disguise whether or not she wished it to be removed, Di could assure him, with the most cheerful sincerity, that it would be a thousand pities to touch it, since it was an excellent picture and remarkably well placed.

Poor Malcolm ! He was sunk in tender recollections—she was asking the painter's name. Fortunately he was far too loyal to own to the smallest feeling of disappointment, and would only admit to himself that he was happy in possessing a wife blessed with such even spirits and such an unjealous disposition. He would even at times go so far as to confess that Di's cheerful forecasts had proved more correct than his own forebodings of evil. This evening, however, he could not bring himself to be quiet. In another five minutes he was at his wife's side again.

‘ My love, I really must consult you.’

Di threw down her book. ‘ What now ?’ she said.

‘ As to this constant companionship of theirs. Tell me seriously what you think of it.’

‘ Dear me, if I must be so very serious, I should say that Dora found him slightly more amusing than old Simon, and that he——’

‘ Yes,’ said Sir Malcolm anxiously, as she paused. ‘ What do you think of him ?’

‘ Why, that he may, or may not, remember to inquire how she is when next we see him in London.’

Sir Malcolm shook his head. ‘ That is hardly being serious,’ he said.

Di broke into a gay laugh. ‘ You dear good man ! If you only could be happy without for

ever finding something to be miserable about! Can't you see that Dora is quite a child still? and as for Angus, I am sure we have seen him just as much devoted half a dozen times already.'

'That is the very thing—if she did but know it.'

'Oh! she will have to find it out, if necessary. Girls can't be kept in cotton for ever. They must learn the ways of the world, like other people.'

A look of distress crossed his face. 'You do not quite mean that, love? You cannot, I am sure. We have taken charge of Dora, she has no other guardians here, and I cannot bear to think that, through any thoughtlessness on his part or carelessness on ours, that bright, beautiful little thing should run a risk of being made unhappy.'

'Beautiful! Well, I don't know—Dora is a pretty girl enough—but it is too soon to say whether the world in general will call her *beautiful*. And Angus, who has seen everybody, would be particular, of course.'

'And have not I as good a right as he?' asked Sir Malcolm, smiling at his wife. 'But at least you must own that she is very captivating, and that he seems to be aware of it. He has now been here for a fortnight as her daily companion, and I must say he has been a most attentive one. When they have music he is

always hanging round the piano, and, as you know, he sent for those Scotch songs on purpose that she might learn them. When they dance reels he is generally teaching her the steps himself; and it is just the same out of doors, wherever they are together it is always she whom he is attending to, and I really cannot but think that many girls——’ He paused.

‘ Might have fallen in love with him on half the provocation,’ continued Di composedly. ‘ Very true, but, as I said, she is a child in these matters.’

‘ Eighteen, surely, and some at eighteen——’ again he paused, forgetting for a few moments not only Dora, but even Di herself.

‘ Barely eighteen, and then she has been brought up so very correctly by that most careful of Goodies, that I don’t believe she would think of such a thing for years to come.’

‘ It may come without thinking,’ said he gravely.

‘ Well, well—a wilful man must have his way! Only just tell me what we are to do or to say.’

This was not so easy. Sir Malcolm hesitated a good deal. ‘ Some little caution, perhaps,’ he suggested at last.

‘ What sort of a caution?’

‘ That, my dear, I will leave to you, women can always manage these things best.’

‘So men like to think when anything tiresome has to be done ! Now *I* think that as a man and a brother it is you who should speak to Angus.’

‘But it is so difficult—so awkward—to find fault with a brother in one’s own house.’

‘Send him out of your house, then. Tell him it is high time for him to go to Kildrummie and pay his respects to Lady McLean.’

‘He hates the place ! and he always says he wouldn’t pay court to anyone, even if she had a kingdom to leave him !’

‘Never mind that ; he would be very foolish to neglect her. I dare say she likes a little attention as well as any young lady can do, and he ought to show some now, as we heard she had been unwell.’

‘True, and I believe we should have asked her here ourselves.’

An acute observer of Lady Campbell’s face at this moment might have guessed that there was little chance of such an invitation being sent.

‘You told me,’ she answered, ‘that you particularly wished to invite no one else just now.’

This was too true to be denied. Sir Malcolm, glad to escape from the fatigues of the season and the session, had made a special petition for two or three weeks of quietness before beginning the necessary social duties of a county member.

‘Besides,’ continued Di, ‘for us to have her here would be no attention on Angus’ part. Let

him go to her himself. He will be close to the Grants—there are three girls there, none of them bad-looking. He would have forgotten Dora before a week was out.’

‘You have great faith in the safety of numbers, my dear Di. He is hardly so bad as that.’

‘Where is the badness, when everyone knows he is not in a position to marry yet; so that his attentions mean nothing at all—unless, indeed, *one* thing were to happen.’

‘That,’ said Sir Malcolm, ‘does not now seem to be very probable.’

‘I dare say not—men are so foolish. But, at any rate, it cannot be Dora; and as he must know it perfectly well himself, you really need not trouble about the matter. But if you are uneasy, there is Kildrummie.’

Certainly, there was Kildrummie, more than twenty miles away across the moors, and a desolate place it was, inhabited by a cross old woman and her much-enduring companion. Sir Malcolm had no hope in this direction: he could not propose such a banishment to his brother. It was more possible to try to believe that his wife might be right and his own anxieties needless. He would endeavour to put them away; he would not allow himself to watch and to suspect his brother’s manners to Dora, but would ascribe his attentions to mere friendliness only, a resolution which he carried out

bravely that evening through all the merry songs in the drawing-room and still merrier reels in the hall, practised nightly under the instruction of Donald, the piper. But either nature or the facts before him were too strong for this happier frame of mind to continue long undisturbed; another four-and-twenty hours found him just as uneasy as ever.

It was Sunday, a different day now at Glenarchie to the Sundays it had seen of old, in the times when the Campbells had considered 'Kirk' to be as much their natural destination in Scotland as 'Church' could be in England. There was a little white-washed building not a mile distant, the only ugly object in all the glen, and there for many a year had the shepherds and keepers had the satisfaction of beholding 'Glenarchie' occupying his arm-chair in the van of the congregation, confronting the Rev. Mr. McTiffin, for many a long hour with all possible attention and decorum. But now when Sunday morning came round, and the little congregation descending in twos and threes from many a lonely shealing like separate mountain rivulets joined their small forces together in one respectable stream down the road that led through the glen, they would find themselves obliged to step aside to make way for Lady Campbell's barouche, as it came whirling along, conveying herself and all the party to the Episcopal chapel six miles

distant. Sir Malcolm, however, still was to be seen in his arm-chair in the afternoon, and on this particular afternoon he came into the hall on his way to kirk, and, finding some of the younger ones also prepared for a start, inquired whether they meant to accompany him. He was told that they were going to walk across the moors back to church for the afternoon service. Mr. Campbell had promised to show them the way. Mr. Campbell, appearing at the same moment, confirmed the statement.

‘It is too far for Dora,’ said Sir Malcolm.

‘Only three miles, Mr. Campbell says, and I can do that quite easily.’

‘It is over four.’

‘Not if you know where to cross the burns,’ said Angus. ‘Miss Vaughan is going to entrust herself to me, and I have engaged to get her there within three.’

‘I never knew you go before,’ said Sir Malcolm, with a look of vexation.

‘Very true, behold the force of example! You take us there in the morning, and we take ourselves in the afternoon.’

‘You will be very late.’

‘Not at all; we have over an hour to do it in, and at any rate we shall not keep a whole kirk-full waiting, as you will if you stay much longer. Do you know, Miss Vaughan, that one most dismal, wet Sunday last year we both

discovered that we had bad colds, and couldn't think of kirk, and just as we had made ourselves most comfortable over the fire—whisky and water, you know, and all that sort of thing——'

'Speak for yourself,' said Sir Malcolm dryly.

'I will, and for you too. Just at that very moment up came a messenger from McTiffin to say that the "meenister and a' the folk had been waiting one whole half-hour, and when wud Glenarchie be pleased to coom awa?"'

Sir Malcolm turned away, determined not to smile.

'And I think,' continued Angus with a mischievous look, 'that Glenarchie will be having another deputation, unless he makes haste and takes himself off.'

Glenarchie departed, silenced but not satisfied. No efforts of his own or of McTiffin's could prevent visions of his brother at Dora's side rising before him as he sat in his arm-chair, accompanied by uneasy meditations as to the course of conduct which the frequent repetition of this little figure-piece might shortly render it incumbent on him to pursue.

CHAPTER XII.

Nor did she come
In *Rowles* and *Curles*, mincing and stately dumbe,
But in a maiden's native blush and fears,
Fresh as those roses which the dayspring wears.
O sweet divine simplicity ! O grace
Beyond a curlèd lock, or paintèd face !

HENRY VAUGHAN.

COULD Dora have known that her host was feeling painful solicitude on her account she would indeed have been surprised. Of anxious care she had had but small personal experience, and she had never felt more happy and lighthearted than during the last three charming weeks of health and exercise spent amidst the beauties of nature that surrounded Glenarchie. Life at the Castle was delightfully free and unfettered—Sir Malcolm's kind hospitality and Di's dislike to formal restraint combining to make the place a real Liberty Hall ; and many were the gay parties when the ladies and Rob the pony would meet the hungry shooters or fishermen with a well-filled luncheon basket, or, better still, with provision for a gipsy tea, the latter bringing in its train the charms of stick-gathering and kettle-

boiling, with a wreath of blue peat-smoke curling away over the mountain side. Then sketch-books would come out, that some splendid, if impossible, effect might be attempted with exclamations of rapture and sighs of despair, or Sir Malcolm would call on the group round the fire for a song—as there was a vein of music among them—to be enlivened by some chorus in which most would join—Harold, who, Dora felt convinced, might surpass them all, could he only be prevailed upon to try, wisely maintaining this high eminence by never opening his mouth excepting to criticise. Such were the sources of her happiness, which had been increased by Mr. Campbell's arrival, only because he had made them even merrier and livelier than they were before. He was also a picturesque addition to their party, in the kilt, jacket, and sporran, which both brothers wore when in their native Highlands. The dark grey eyes, which formed the principal feature in Mr. Campbell's expressive countenance, seemed to sparkle with double life beneath the shadow of his Scotch bonnet and the sprig of sweet wild gale, or Highland myrtle, the Campbell badge, which it was Donald's daily duty to fasten into the bonnets of the laird and his guests. But though Dora had laid aside all fear of those once-alarming eyes, she now found in them nothing more than goodwill and good fellowship, while her one ungratified wish at this

particular time bore no reference whatever to their owner, as it consisted entirely of an ardent desire to see Harold appear in Highland costume. Vain, however, was all her eloquence, for at every fresh entreaty Harold would curtly inform her that only snobs and cockneys rushed into other people's kilts. Excepting in this small particular, she might now be said to be completely happy. Nevertheless Sir Malcolm shook his head, or felt as if he ought to shake it, every time he looked at her on the morning that followed the afternoon walk to church.

The post-hour was late at Glenarchie, the barefooted bearer of the bag seldom arriving at the Castle before the middle of the day. Monday's post was apt to be a heavy one, and when Angus entered the dining-room on his return from a morning on the moors he found the home party still lingering round the luncheon-table busied with papers and letters.

'You here,' said Sir Malcolm, looking up; 'I thought you were with the boys.'

'I left them an hour ago. Any despatches for me—no—that's a mercy!'

'Oh! Uncle Angus,' whispered Effie, as she began to clear a place at the table for his use, 'don't you like having letters?'

'Depends upon who writes them, little woman. You have a fine long epistle yourself, it seems.'

‘Yes, from Miss Goode.’

‘Ah! I’ve no good lady to write to me, you see, or I might find letters as interesting as you and some other people.’

He was looking at Dora, who had not noticed his entrance, but sat, a picture of wrapt intentness while, with smiling lips, her eyes followed Uncle John’s strong well-known characters, with which the pages before her were covered. She was back at Hurst, heart and soul, and there she might have remained for some time longer had not a sudden cry from Effie made her look up. The little girl was defending with all her power a brown ribbon tied round her neck, part of which was hidden under her dress, while a part had come unexpectedly to light, and was tightly grasped in her uncle’s fingers.

‘Papa,’ she cried in an agony, ‘Papa, don’t let him touch it.’

‘Now, Malcolm, you have no right whatever to step in. This is a most important discovery! Come, Effie, come; whose can it be? Just whisper his name, and I’ll never betray you.’

‘Oh! it isn’t—it isn’t!’ gasped the little girl, struggling to be free.

‘But it *is* a lock of hair, for I saw it.’

‘Papa,’ she implored again, ‘take him away!’

Sir Malcolm would have risen, but Di was before him.

‘Nonsense,’ she cried, coming forward, ‘don’t make a fuss about nothing, Effie. What can it signify whether anyone sees a piece of hair or not? Show it, like a sensible child.’

Effie looked piteously at her father, who held out his hand. She broke away, caught it, and hid her face on his shoulder.

‘It’s only Dora’s, papa,’ she sobbed, in a burst of tears.

‘Dora’s, my child! And why do you cry?’

‘Yours!’ Mr. Campbell turned with a change of countenance towards Dora, who had risen, a flush upon her own. How very disagreeable of Mr. Campbell to worry poor little Effie about such a trifle, and to be laughing at herself, no doubt, in his heart, as a sentimental young lady, when in truth she had no idea of any particular destination for the little curl which Effie had begged from her two days before. It was not at all nice of Mr. Campbell.

‘Why do you cry, my poor child?’ asked Sir Malcolm again.

‘Because,’ the words were scarcely audible, ‘I wanted to keep it such a great secret.’

There were smiles on three faces. Dora thought one of them strongly sarcastic.

‘There is nothing whatever to be ashamed of, my dear,’ said her father as he stroked his daughter’s flaxen head.

‘Ashamed of!’ cried Angus, as he pulled her

back again. 'I should think not, indeed. Come here, you little family shower-bath, and tell us what sort of a locket I shall get for you to keep this superlatively precious treasure in.'

'There,' said Di, 'you hear, Effie? It's not every little girl who gets a locket by crying, so dry your eyes, and thank your uncle.'

Effie tried to obey, and to give an April smile, but the tears still fell fast. Not all the lockets in London could have restored the sense of secrecy which had imparted so wonderful a charm to the wearing of that little shining curl. Not even Dora herself had known that it lay, was to lie for ever close to her heart—a heart formed to believe and to adore, filled to the brim with the mysterious joys of romantic affection. In one moment she had seen her sacred things profaned—poor little devotee! As the sobs could not yet be entirely silenced, Di, who thought this had lasted quite long enough, and that the sooner Effie learnt to make less fuss the better, rose and quitted the room with the two girls. The smile still lingered on Mr. Campbell's face as he closed the door behind them. 'Precocious romance indeed,' he remarked. 'Appalling for the future!'

'So long as she makes such a good choice we have nothing to fear.'

'No; and how long does an innocent father believe that the enthusiastic little soul will cherish

a lady's lock only above that romantic heart of hers ?'

'I certainly believe Dora Vaughan to be capable of making more than a passing impression on any one.'

The tone was more significant than the words. Angus, after bestowing one rapid comprehending glance upon his brother, returned to his luncheon, a look of amusement still visible on his face.

'Do not you agree with me, Angus ?'

'Most entirely. No doubt Effie will find by-and-by that she has a host of rivals.'

Sir Malcolm watched his brother for a short time in silence. That defiant glance and unembarrassed air were not unknown to him ; they must be faced at once.

'Angus,' he broke out again, 'there is something I must say. You will not be offended ?'

'Not in the least—or shall I say it for you ? "Old experience doth attain," you know.'

'I am quite serious ; pray understand that.'

'No doubt, as before. Last year you were deeply serious on two several occasions ; I laid your remarks well to heart, and repeated them to myself when both the young ladies married within the year—myself not being the object of their choice, if you remember, on either occasion.'

Sir Malcolm turned away, silent and annoyed.

‘How fortunate,’ continued Angus in modest meditation, ‘that I am not by nature a vain man! Could anything injure my native humility, it must have been ruined long ago by your frequent insinuations.’

‘You think so? We differ there. I never consider it offering a man praise to tell him that his manners are calculated to mislead an inexperienced girl. It is not a distinction I should have desired for myself.’

‘Certainly not—though if I am not mistaken the young ladies you took under your protection last year scarcely came under the head of “inexperienced girls.” One was——’

‘Never mind them,’ interrupted his brother hastily, ‘I am not talking of them.’

‘But you did talk of them at considerable length. You were eloquent on the subject of blighted affections.’

‘If I was wrong then,’ said Sir Malcolm, ‘and I am by no means convinced of that, I am not wrong now. I am in my own house; I am bound to watch over the safety and happiness of a young girl who has been trusted to our care.’

‘I am sorry,’ said Angus, coolly, ‘that you should put yourself to needless trouble. I was not aware that either were in danger.’

‘Not intentionally endangered, I am sure. Anything that might be misconstrued on your

part, springs, I know, from a want of thought only. Yet it may not do the less harm.'

'What can possibly be "misconstrued" on my part now?'

'Not any one thing in particular, so far as I know, but many things often repeated. You are daily at Dora's side; you talk with her constantly without reserve. You are with her in walks—on the water—at all times.'

'Perfectly true; she is always with Effie, and I treat the one as I treat the other—that, and nothing more.'

'But Dora is not your niece.'

'She very well might be. Whatever her actual age may be—sixteen—seventeen—whatever it is——'

'She was eighteen last month,' said Sir Malcolm emphatically.

'Well, let her be eighteen in years; in mind she is as young and innocent as any child.'

'The very thing I wish her to remain.'

'Amen, with all my heart—and that she may long continue; so do let us go on being on a natural friendly footing without fears and fancies, as we have been from the very beginning.'

The bright frankness of the smile that accompanied the words was difficult to resist. Sir Malcolm paused and pondered. Did Angus really not know the power of his own attrac-

tions? Was Dora's present simplicity of character an absolute safeguard? Was eighteen too young for an attachment to be formed consciously or unconsciously? His own experience answered that question. But he had sought Effie Douglas with a full determination before she had reached that age. Here there was nothing but unreserved friendliness on his brother's side to be taken into account. Was that the safest state of things for Dora, or the most dangerous?

'Well,' he said, 'it must be left to you and your own good feeling. I could not be happy without speaking; I will say no more, but only beg you to remember that, though she is like a child still, an hour may turn her into a woman.'

'Heaven postpone that unhappy hour! but it's further off than you believe, my dear fellow—and as to danger from me—depend upon it, if you only knew it, she looks upon me as no end of an old fogey.'

'An old fogey!' said Sir Malcolm, forced to smile at last. 'I never saw such an one before.'

'You don't see with the eyes of eighteen! Never fear. I'm as steady as old Time—harmless as a lamb, and she is as fresh as flowers in May.'

'She is—and as fair. If she were not——'

But Angus was gone; the lamb had escaped to green pastures outside the window, and Malcolm was left to finish his sentence to himself.

That afternoon, some hours later, Dora came down the path from the Castle to the loch, her sketch-book in her hand, and chose a green nook among boughs and bracken for her post. Here she worked, happily unconscious of the flight of time, excepting as it was marked by the lengthening shadows on the landscape before her, until, roused by a footstep, she looked up and saw Mr. Campbell descending the path. He stopped in front of her green retreat.

‘Is this a fairy hidden in the fern?’ Then, stepping towards her, ‘Ah! Miss Vaughan, it is you.’

‘Yes.’ Without more words Dora rose and began to put up her drawing.

‘You are not flying like a real fairy at the approach of mortal foot?’

‘I have finished my drawing.’

‘Allow me to see,’ and he took it from her hand. ‘Now, I should have said there was at least another hour’s work here.’

She took it back without replying.

‘May I not carry it for you?’

‘No, thank you. I am going home.’

‘But this is not being at all a good fairy, and, speaking as a mortal, I fear Miss Vaughan is sadly unforgiving. I am in disgrace, I see.’

She blushed, conscious of having felt very cross with him for some hours past.

‘It was high treason to touch that precious

lock ; I confess it—but indeed I did not know it was wrong, for I didn't know it was yours.'

'It was not, because it was mine that it signified.'

'But I was a barbarous uncle to make Effie cry?'

'Well—if you ask me, I don't think it was very kind.'

'Most true! You see a penitent before you ; he owns his guilt ; he implores forgiveness ; he'll never do it again.'

Her face relaxed a little.

'He trusts to be pardoned, and so—may he have that sketch-book *now*?'

She yielded, a little bit ashamed of her ill-humour, and was just turning homewards, when her eye was caught by a moving object below.

'There are the boys coming home,' she cried, and in another minute had vanished down the path leading to the loch.

Angus followed more slowly, pausing with a smile on his lips as he came in sight of her again, shaking her head over the gamebag with gay reproaches—laughing at the ducks and drakes that Harold and Charlie began to make across the smooth water—and finally declaring, as she caught a pebble from her brothers with a wilful little gesture, that she could certainly beat them both herself!

When the boys took up their guns again

and were moving away, Angus came to her side again.

‘Di was wanting some lilies,’ he said. ‘Shall we get them before going back? They are just across the creek—it will not take ten minutes.’

He loosened the chain of a boat lying outside the stone steps of the landing-place, and she stepped in readily. The shining levels of the loch lay most invitingly before them, and there was no especial need to hurry across the creek to the lily-beds that lay beyond. Mr. Campbell did not hurry; he rowed a few strokes, then paused upon the oars to point out the shadows of the evening clouds floating above their heads, to repeat the names of the mountain peaks, or to speak of other scenes on other lochs until he had begun a description of the childish days in which he had first learnt to know them. Dora’s attention was quickly won by the tale; she did not even perceive that they had reached the lily-bed, and long—very long did the oars lie motionless among the broad leaves while she listened to the narrator’s story, beginning with his early remembrance of the dark train of mourners that followed the funeral of his father, Sir Angus, through a world buried in snow, to the ruined abbey where all the Campbells of Glenarchie had been laid in turn; then telling of the wild free life which he with his elder brother and sister had led as children;

sometimes in this lovely glen, sometimes at a far wilder shooting-lodge in distant mountains where they would spend whole summers in happy loneliness, the interest reaching its climax when he touched upon their beautiful, gifted Irish mother who had known no comfort in her widowhood save that of living for the children from whom she had been taken, just at the beginning of his own college life. Here Angus broke off abruptly, unable any longer to continue or to meet the deep intent gaze of the blue eyes that had long been fastened upon his face.

When he ceased, Dora sighed, sat silent, then spoke as though to herself, 'Fourteen years alone! How glad she must have been to die.'

'She was ready—she was glad. The loss was ours.'

'Ah! yes, and it seems a pity too that she should not have lived a little longer, for how proud she would have been of all you did.'

It was spoken, as he knew, straight from a warm young heart, without one thought of personal compliment, and he answered with equal honesty.

'Perhaps so. I may have felt that myself sometimes. Yet if I have wished her back again it was for my own sake, not for hers.'

'It must have been dreadful to lose her!'

'Yes, indeed! Few men, I suppose, have lost

a mother at such a time of their lives without feeling that it would have been better for them—that they might have been better themselves—if she had lived.’

Her answering eyes rested on his for a few seconds, then turned to the transparent depths around them, as if she were trying to follow out her own thought there.

‘I suppose,’ she said, ‘that it is difficult for anyone to be as good as they would like to be in London.’

He smiled. ‘You do not like London?’

‘Yes, I do; at least, I think I should like to be there for a little sometimes, but I shall never try, for Uncle John does not think it a good place for people to live in.’

‘But all people cannot choose where they will live, and everybody has not a guardian Uncle John.’

‘Oh, no, and of course it is not so bad for you—for any gentleman, I mean—as it would be for me.’

‘Indeed! May I ask why not?’

‘Because men have work to do, and I should have none. I should only go about amusing myself.’

‘And would that make the difference?’

‘Yes, all the difference, I think.’

‘You have a great idea, then, of the dignity of labour?’

‘Of course! That is just where gentlemen are so much the best off, they always have work to do, and ladies have none.’

‘Really? Would you really like to act Portia? Shall I resign you my wig and gown whenever I retire to vegetate at Kildrummie?’

‘Where is that? Who lives at Kildrummie?’

‘A certain old aunt of ours.’

‘And are you ever going to live with her?’

‘Not exactly. But it is popularly supposed—though, indeed, I hardly know why—that she intends making me a present of it when she has no further use for it herself.’

‘Oh, yes! I remember. Di did tell me, but I had forgotten!’

‘Why must I remind her?’ thought Angus, angry with himself. ‘If there was one innocent little creature in the world who could think of me apart from Kildrummie, why had I not the sense to let her alone?’

He raised the idle oars, and Dora, leaning over the side of the boat, began to gather the long-forgotten water-lilies, wondering over the delicate beauty of each carved cup of ivory and gold as she raised it from its leafy bed.

‘But they are quite small,’ she said, ‘not half the size of those that grow in the Abbot’s Pool at home.’

‘Of course not, Miss Vaughan, how could they be in our poor despised Highlands! I have

not now to be told that the Ridgeway is twice the height of Ben Lomond !’

‘ But you *have* to be told, Mr. Campbell, for it is *quite* true, that there is no place, not even this, more beautiful than Hurst !’

‘ A devoted daughter of Dr. Johnson ! But let me row out a little, and see if we cannot find something worth looking at—even in the Highlands !’

They had been resting underneath a woody promontory, but five minutes’ vigorous pulling brought them beyond its point, and when the whole length of Loch Archie disclosed itself to Dora’s gaze, often as she had seen it, she could not restrain a cry of admiration. The sun had sunk during their conversation behind a magnificent mountain giant, whose sapphire outline now stood up in purest clearness against a saffron-coloured sky. Light masses of fleecy clouds hung over the departing monarch like a triumphal arch, through which he was passing to his other dominions, sending back glorious tokens of his unseen progress to the billowy clouds overhead which glowed, now with rosy pink, now with brilliant gold and crimson. Innumerable mountain-tops stood up in various depths of shade, until the last and nearest crags were reflected, dark, almost to blackness, in the sleeping waters below, while the rest of the loch, even to the very ripples that broke against the

side of their boat, seemed set on fire by the radiant sky above them.

Dora sat motionless, her hands folded, her eyes lifted, her whole soul absorbed in the sight, with feelings too intense and satisfying to know any need of sympathy. Her companion, after a few brief glances, leant back and watched from beneath his slanting bonnet's brim those widely opened eyes, clear as the eastern evening skies, and which at that moment, he truly believed, must hide as pure a heaven behind them. Never had he watched them with greater pleasure, nor felt so strong a sense of satisfaction in Dora's company as at the present moment, for if there could ever have been a shadow of doubt, the last hour had made it evident that he had been right and Malcolm wrong in their late conversation, for had he not just seen her playing like a child? He was certain that the soul before him was too open, young, and guileless, to conceal either its deeper or more passing feelings. It was unconscious of self, simple and strong, the ready sympathy and care for others flowing from it at a touch showing plainly that no personal emotion had absorbed the energies of the heart. Her fearless references to himself revealed no trace of peculiar sentiment, and how delightful was it to feel on a footing of unembarrassed natural friendship with so fresh

and innocent and bright a soul as hers! One, too, that dwelt in such a fair young form—she looked like Undine now, a very water-nymph indeed with the water-lilies beside her. Such was her fitting emblem; nothing on earth was so like her as that unearthly birth, a crystal stream, a little mountain burn in its first pure beauty, now flinging itself from rock to rock in eager sparkling brightness, now dancing down amidst the heather in unchecked freedom, always fresh, always joyous, always reflecting back the light of heaven above it. Long might it be before a change should come, before the little stream must leave the mountain side to find a lower level, submitting to be directed, confined, perhaps sullied, by the hand of man, and woe to any sacrilegious hand that should dare to attempt the profanation!

In such meditations he indulged until at length the glow paled and Dora's eyes fell down to earth once more.

‘In spite of Hurst and its beauties, Miss Vaughan, you will not forget our Highland sunsets.’

‘Never! I can never forget Loch Archie.’

They rowed home in silence, until, as she steered the boat towards the low harbour wall, a tall figure standing motionless beside it caught her eye.

‘There is Sir Malcolm,’ she said.

His brother glanced round and rowed more slowly than before.

‘I have been waiting for you,’ said Sir Malcolm gravely, as he assisted Dora to land.

Angus made no answer.

‘There has been a messenger from Kildrummie with this’—Sir Malcolm showed a letter in his hand—‘we must start at once. She died last night.’

CHAPTER XIII.

Die Seele war der Knospe gleich,
Die will, und sich nicht aufthun kann.

RÜCKERT.

LADY McLEAN, the intelligence of whose death had arrived at Glenarchie Castle, was sister to the late Sir Angus Campbell. During the last twenty years she had been a widow, solitary and childless, occupying the position of melancholy state which comes to those advanced in life who, while rich in money, are poor in friends. Her husband, a retired Indian judge, considerably his wife's senior, had left at her sole disposal the estate of Kildrummie, which he himself had purchased. Here she had lived on in loneliness, few people caring to encounter her unamiable nature and the jealous suspicions apt to be shown towards anyone who approached her with kindness during the later years of her life. She had exhibited more favour to her nephew Angus than to anyone else, almost, if not absolutely admitting that her property would hereafter be his. Now that the stroke for some time apprehended by the doctors had fallen, and ended fatally, Sir Malcolm naturally turned to his

brother as the person most interested in the matter. His own presence, as head of the house, would be required at Kildrummie without delay, and he took it for granted that Angus would accompany him. To this, however, the latter demurred, refusing to admit that any dependence was to be placed on their late aunt's uncertain fancy, and yielding only to Sir Malcolm's earnest desire and request for his companionship and assistance in the task that lay before him. The two brothers therefore started together on the following morning, leaving the diminished party to lament their absence in various moods of dulness or depression. The weather itself was melancholy, the gorgeous sunset had proved to be the herald of a storm, and an even downpour of rain now set in, confining all to the house, and obliging them to listen day after day to Di's often-repeated comments on the late event, joined to prophecies respecting the change it must at once make in her brother-in-law's position. 'Lady This and Mrs. That would now be absolutely wild to secure him at once for some daughter or other; he had better make a choice and marry in self-defence, or he would be torn in pieces between them.' Dora heard it all with the disdain of eighteen, silently concluding that Uncle John had indeed been in the right, and that London was not at all a good place for people to live in.

Even Highland rain exhausts itself at last, and after six days of imprisonment a morning dawned so clear and lovely that Dora sprang up as soon as her eyes unclosed and was quickly out on the mountain side breathing the morning breezes as they swept by, laden with the scent of Highland birch and sweet wild myrtle, and rejoicing in the recovered loveliness of moor, loch, and glen. She was returning homeward after nearly an hour's ramble, when the sound of a horse's feet caught her ear, and looking down upon the road to the Castle now lying beneath her, saw a single horseman riding up the glen. This must be the early messenger expected by Di, who was to forestall the tardy post in announcing Mr. Campbell's succession to the estate. She sighed, for Di's prophecies returned upon her mind. Was it necessary to believe that the world was so contemptible, and if so, what good would Mr. Campbell gain from any fortune that must make him the object of mercenary schemers? With a slackened step she pursued her homeward path, entering the Castle just as the great clock sounded the hour of nine, when the household generally assembled for prayers in the hall. It was empty to-day, but just as she entered it on one side the dining-room door opened on the other, and Effie in an agony of distress passed by her, rushing up the staircase. She was quickly followed by Harold.

‘Where is she?’ he said abruptly.

‘Effie? Gone upstairs. Is anything the matter?’

Harold’s face was flushed, and his hands clenched. ‘Don’t I wish she was a boy, just!’ he muttered between his teeth; ‘I’d teach her to bully.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘A nice thing by way of a mother, indeed!’

‘Oh, Harry! come here’—she pulled him into the drawing-room and shut the door. ‘Tell me what has happened. Is anything wrong?’

‘Angus Campbell is cut off without a sixpence, and Effie has got everything! If you call that right, I don’t!’

‘Impossible! it can’t be true.’

‘But it is! Sir Malcolm has written.’

‘And Effie knows it?’

‘Doesn’t she! You should have heard dear stepmamma improve the occasion—fling it in her face and reproach her with it, as if the wretched child could help it!’

Dora had never seen Harold so angry; he stamped up and down the room in a positive rage.

‘I could have knocked her down with pleasure!’ he said. ‘It was a shame, a disgrace, to bully a little innocent like that!’

‘Poor Effie! what did she do?’

‘Got as white as a sheet, and trembled all

over. I declare, I thought she would faint outright, only she took to the other tack, and sobbed like a steam-engine—poor little soul!’

‘But what does Sir Malcolm say? Can he like it?’

‘Like it! You should see his letter! He says he doesn’t know which is most injured, his brother or his daughter. He can’t *bear* it.’

‘Oh! why did Lady McLean do it!’

‘Goodness knows! Because she was a woman, I suppose! Women should never be allowed any money of their own at all; they are sure to make some muddle of it, living or dead!’

‘Will Mr. Campbell mind *very* much?’

Harold shrugged his shoulders. ‘He had made sure of it, of course, and nobody likes to be regularly done. But he won’t say half as much about it as Sir Malcolm does, I dare say.’

The sentiments of the latter were soon made known to Dora as Di put his letter into her hands at once. No words could be stronger than those in which he painted his astonishment and vexation on finding that Effie had been thrust into her uncle’s place. His own conviction that a large property was anything but an advantage to a young girl, and his distress at the disappointment which Angus, however well he might conceal it, could not but be feeling, were dwelt upon in terms of greater energy than he would have permitted himself to use had he

supposed that they would reach Effie's ears. But the postscript in the corner, begging that she be told as briefly and calmly as possible, had come too late in the letter to be of any use. Di had read the whole letter aloud, with many an exclamation of astonishment and dismay, and when Dora pointed out the warning, would only declare that, as Effie must know the whole, it mattered very little how she was told, and for her to be sobbing and crying was so useless and ridiculous that she begged Dora would not encourage anything of the kind.

It was as well for Effie that her tears kept her from the breakfast-table, since she was thus spared hearing her stepmother's many conjectures and lavish compassion over the disinherited Angus, whilst she pulled down all the castles in the air recently built up on his behalf. It was impossible for all not to wonder greatly what cause could have produced Lady McLean's sudden change of mind as to her successor at Kildrummie, but Sir Malcolm had no information whatever to give on this point. He could merely tell them that the will had been executed within the last two months, and so completely was Angus excluded from its benefits that he found himself merely named as trustee, together with his brother, for an estate which he had long had good reason to look upon as his own future property.

How he would look, feel, and act under this reverse of fortune was a strange and interesting question to which Dora found her thoughts constantly returning. Above all, how would he behave to Effie herself? Poor Effie, pale and woe-begone, and looking like anything rather than one of Fortune's favourites, received such consolation as her three friends could offer her with patient resignation, and found her best comfort in a faint hope that possibly the wrong done to Uncle Angus might not be altogether irreparable. Still, she dreaded meeting him, and for the first time in her life longed to hear that he was not coming back to Glenarchie.

A vain wish! Though her father's letter had said nothing about the return of either, yet that same afternoon, when the two girls came in from their walk, a well-known bonnet and tartan were lying in their old corner in the hall. Effie's heart sank in utter dismay. Uncle Angus must be in the house, in the drawing-room no doubt, for the door was shut. She clasped Dora's hand.

'He is here,' she whispered. 'He must be alone, as mamma is out in the carriage. Oh, what shall I do?'

'Go to him at once.'

'Come with me,' pleaded Effie. But Dora drew back.

'No; it would be better not. He would

rather see you alone. Go to him, dear Effie, and trust—go bravely.'

To do anything bravely was quite out of Effie's power, but most timidly she did contrive to creep towards the drawing-room door, to turn the lock and glide inside. Before the door was closed again, Mr. Campbell's voice in greeting came to Dora's ear as she stood leaning against the billiard-table, her own heart beating faster than usual in sympathetic excitement, waiting for Effie's return. Could that gay laugh which presently sounded through the door really be Mr. Campbell's? It was indeed, as surely as it was he himself who the next minute opened the door and stood before her, looking exactly the same as usual,

'Miss Vaughan! Here I am once more—a very bad shilling come back again, you see. Ah!' as she advanced into the room holding out her hand, 'how truly kind of you not to object to shake hands with such a creature as I am—a poor ruined beggar, as Effie has just informed me.'

'No, Uncle Angus. No! I only said that mamma said——'

'I really do believe,' he went on, without pausing, 'that she was quite disappointed not to see me appear outside the window with a dog and a string, and only one eye—or one leg—which ought it to be, Effie?'

‘Oh, Uncle Angus! *please* don’t.’

‘Never mind! Some day you shall find a nice little cottage for me at Kildrummie, and you and Miss Vaughan will bring out the remains of the luncheon in a charitable basket, just as you do to old Janet at the lodge.’

‘I won’t,’ and Effie, breathless with excitement, threw herself into her uncle’s arms. ‘You shall be in the dining-room—you shall have it all! Oh, promise me! do promise me!’

‘My dear child, don’t put yourself into such a state, and I’ll promise you anything you like.’

‘Then promise me you will live at Kildrummie instead of me, for I don’t want it at all—I don’t, Uncle Angus—I would much rather you should have it, and,’ with a great sob, ‘I couldn’t bear that you should leave off loving me because I had it!’

‘My little woman,’ and he kissed her kindly, ‘don’t be afraid of that.’

‘Then you will! And can I do it before I’m one and twenty, for Charlie thought I couldn’t?’

‘What! you and he have been concocting this fine scheme together, have you?’

‘Oh, yes, we have! And you have promised now!’

‘But promises are awkward things to keep for seven years, and he was quite right, Kildrummie won’t be yours to give away to anybody until you are of age.’

Effie looked sadly disappointed.

‘And by that time,’ he went on, ‘I should not be surprised to find it had been promised to someone else—Master Charlie himself perhaps.’

‘Oh, no, Uncle Angus! How could he ask for such a thing?’

Angus laughed merrily. ‘Now, suppose you run up to my room,’ he said, ‘and bring me a little parcel you will see upon the table.’

She vanished, and he turned to Dora. ‘Miss Vaughan, do tell me about that poor child. What a pitiful little face she wore; has she been very unhappy?’

‘Yes, very unhappy indeed.’

‘Who told her about it?’

‘Di told her.’

‘Ah—h—h. And someone, I find, has been impressing her small mind with the idea I should be in a towering rage—ready to eat her. I mustn’t ask questions, of course, but—it can hardly have been the cat—and I am not to think it was you, am I?’

Her colour rose. She shook her head.

‘Malcolm and I wished afterwards that he had left me to tell my own tale, but when he wrote we hardly knew how soon I might be able to get away. He must stay for the present, but he has kindly let me off, and I think I could have managed the matter without quite so many tears as I can see have been shed. That’s right,’

as Effie, returning, offered him a little box. 'Open it yourself and see what you think of it.'

She obeyed, and saw within a jeweller's box the perfection of a locket, smooth, golden, heart-shaped. Effie uttered a cry of admiration as her hand went up to the ribbon round her neck.

'Well, will it do?'

The little girl stood motionless. 'Uncle Angus—it's not for me?'

'To be sure it is for you. Why not?'

'But when did you get it?'

'This morning, I came round by Glasgow.'

'This morning—just when you knew!'

'Knew what? Oh! you think it was a reckless action on the part of a ruined beggar. Never mind, if it was my last sixpence, at least it went in a good cause.'

'Just when I was thinking you wouldn't even like to see me!'

'Just when you were a little goose then! The greatest little goose in the world, to think I should be tearing my hair for want of the dirty acres when I am going to be the Lord Chancellor, rolling in gold, in a very few years' time! So now we'll hear no more of this, but put the lock into the locket—where has it gone?'

The locket was in Dora's hands. As she turned to restore it their eyes met. In his might be seen the revelation of a silent desire; of a longing for some answer from the eyes he

gazed upon. Nor was the answer withheld. In those clear azure depths, admiration, sympathy, and gratitude for his delicate kindness shone out as clearly as the sun at noon-day. At that moment Angus felt that all regret was needless; approbation such as this overpaid his losses! He was absolutely happy, with a new and strange happiness so long as that eloquent gaze rested upon him.

Dora on her side was rejoicing with all the ardour which a young enthusiastic soul can feel at the sight of a generous action prompted by unselfish motives. If any other feeling was mingled with this one, roused by that earnest, longing look, it was at present unknown to herself. Di had been wrong—that was a sufficient cause for gladness—all the world was not governed by low mercenary desires; here was an instance to the contrary. Here was one who could lose a fortune with a cheerful heart, and forget his own disappointment in kindly attempts to console the very person who had caused it. Her own heart glowed as she dwelt on the conduct of the man who had risen to a place in her esteem which neither fortune nor talents would ever have secured for him. The remembrance of Mr. Campbell as he now showed himself would be among the very happiest that she would carry away from Glenarchie.

So Dora felt, not on that day only, but on

every day—too few by far—still to be spent in the Highlands. Something seemed to have entered into the atmosphere around her which made all nature lovelier, and every feeling softer and deeper than before. Why it was she knew not; she only knew herself to be happy in everything but in the recollection that all this would soon be over. Business still detained Sir Malcolm from his home, and, in a letter brought by his brother, he had appointed a day for Di and Effie to meet him in Glasgow, from which place they would go northwards to pay some promised visits. The English trio would then be due at home; a week, therefore, was all that remained for them to spend at Glenarchie. One little week, no more; and as the days fled swiftly by in the old occupations and interests, Dora was hourly sensible how much of their recovered brightness was owing to Mr. Campbell's return. It was he who was still the life of the party,—above all, it was he who imposed silence upon Di, by requiring that Kildrummie should never be alluded to amongst themselves, in a manner that could not be resisted.

Happily Glenarchie lay so far out of the world's swift current that heiress and disinherited might there dwell side by side, safe alike from eager curiosity and officious comment. There was nothing from without to disturb the

peace of this last week, which was spent by the whole party in visiting once more their favourite haunts, and repeating their favourite amusements with the double eagerness arising from a reflection that all must soon be over. Again Angus could take his constant station by Dora's side, nor did she check, or dream that she ought to check, the admiration and interest which were rapidly gaining a deeper hold upon her. It must be right to admire goodness—and surely Mr. Campbell was good. Only she could not account for the shade of sadness of which she began to be now and then conscious. It was impossible that it should be owing to Mr. Campbell, there was no change in his own gay spirits, nor in the considerate kindness of his manner towards Effie. The whole subject of the will had been dropped ; in all the excursions, occupations, and pleasures of the hour he took his place exactly as usual among them, and if that place were day by day at Dora's side, there was no longer any watchful Sir Malcolm among them to notice or to lament it.

CHAPTER XIV

If ever we are nature's, these are ours, this thorn
Doth to our rose of youth rightly belong.

All's well that ends well.

THE evening of the last day had come, and Dora sat alone upon the terrace to take farewell of the scene before her. To-morrow they would begin their journey, in forty-eight hours they would be at home. How strange that she could think of home with so little gladness; how strange and how wrong! Was it possible that six weeks of pleasure could have spoiled her in this way? Oh no! she would not be so childish and ungrateful; she must not and would not give way to useless repinings. When the sound of a well-known step told her that Mr. Campbell was approaching, she hastily brushed away the beginning of a tear, and turned to meet him with an air of resolute cheerfulness. He was sure to be bright and gay, nor should he find her otherwise. His countenance, however, was more grave than gay, and when he placed himself beside her and gazed across the loch, for some time he scarcely uttered a syllable. Together they watched in silence while the evening shadows

—quietest of thieves—crept on their noiseless way, stealing inch by inch all light and colour from tawny cliff and purple crag.

‘Fairyland fades,’ said he at last, as he threw himself back with a sigh; ‘and to-morrow all will be over—we shall all be gone!’

‘You are going to Aberdeenshire, I think?’

‘Yes—to Marion in Aberdeenshire first, and then to some other places; and in November to London again, and to work. And you will be at Hurst?’

‘Yes, I shall be at home.’

‘Forgetting the Highlands in a week among the beauties of Hurst? You see I am coming round to the orthodox faith!’

‘I can never forget the Highlands.’

‘You have not been disappointed, then, in the North?’

‘No, indeed!’

‘To me,’ and his eyes went back from her face to the landscape before them, ‘this has been a time that I shall never forget.’

‘How could you?’ she said in a low voice.

‘You think I have had enough to make me remember it, and to go away with a heavier heart than I brought?’

‘I do not know.’ She spoke with some difficulty; ‘only, we shall remember that you have prevented other people’s hearts—Effie’s I mean --from being heavy too.’

‘Thank you, Miss Vaughan ; that you can say this will be indeed a happy thought to dwell upon ; and though I am gloomy now,’ he tried to laugh as usual, ‘pray don’t set it down to Kildrummie. It is because I never can bear to see a pleasant party break up, or to say the horrid word “Good-bye.” This delightful time has been by far too short. When shall I have the pleasure of meeting you again, I wonder ? Shall you be at home at Christmas ?’

‘Oh, yes ! I am always at home.’

‘Then I may look forward—for kind Lady Merivale has sent me a message through Di to say that she and Sir Philip hope I will come to them then.’

‘Has she really ?’ Dora’s eyes brightened.

‘Yes ; and I am sure I owe this grace to the very thing which will make some people forget that I ever existed. But Lady Merivale is not like the world in general, is she ?’

‘No, indeed she is not.’

‘I must prepare to be rather neglected now, you know.’

‘Not by—her.’

‘Ah ! no, for she belongs to the charmed circle of Hurst.’ It was the old raillery she had often heard, but not spoken with the old manner. There was a seriousness in his voice, and an expression in his eyes as they turned again and

again towards her that were rapidly depriving Dora of all powers of speech.

‘The world, if it remembers me at all, will think that I have met with a great misfortune, and will be honouring me with its pity just now, I dare say. It is welcome to its opinion, which is of very small importance so long as one’s own friends think and know the truth.’

She was silent.

‘For me,’ he continued, ‘I can easily believe that a gain may come out of the present loss. Until now, although I have worked—in a way—I have always imagined that I need not go on doing so unless I wished it; I have supposed a time was coming when I might give up the law and take to any other life I liked better. All that is over; my future is clear. I must work steadily at my own profession, and do the utmost I can there. That is the best way to take everything now, is it not?’

She murmured a faint assent.

‘And so I must content myself with trying hard for legal success, and with it the same——’ he hesitated; ‘perhaps the same happiness in the end. Will you encourage me to think so? One does not want pity, but encouragement from friends is a great assistance.’

‘You are sure to succeed,’ she said softly.

‘You believe it? Then I will believe it also, only,’ here his voice sank to the tone of her

own, 'it seems to set the end a very long way off.'

Dora's heart beat violently ; in a sudden shy revulsion of feeling she could have wished the earth would swallow her up, and hailed as a token of safety the sound of voices at a little distance behind them.

'But one would wait,' he went on hurriedly, 'wait patiently for success and happiness if one could but hope they were coming at last. Miss Vaughan, tell me, do you think indeed that I may have this hope?'

Her cheeks were crimson and she was trembling all over, yet shyness and distress were for the moment mastered by a still more powerful force—by the power of that low entreating voice, by a sense that this was in truth the parting moment. With a great effort she compelled herself to speak, and Angus as he bent towards her heard the whispered answer 'Yes.'

More could be added by neither ; they were no longer alone, though who had joined them or what was said by anyone Dora did not know ; all seemed a dream around her, and in the solitude of her own room, which she hastily sought, it was at first difficult not still to believe that the last ten minutes had been a dream indeed. That Mr. Campbell, who during the last week had avoided all reference to his own prospects, should now have dwelt on them to her was surprising,

and yet more astonishing by far was the way in which he had done it. To her, a young inexperienced girl, he had turned for sympathy, for encouragement; he, though so greatly her superior in all ways, had cared for her opinion, had begged for it with a look and a manner that would not be denied, with an earnestness which she had never known in him before. Those eloquent eyes, that pleading tone; what had they been seeking? Not her wisdom, for she had none. Not her counsel, it was a worthless offering. They were directed to another end, they sought another gift, one that Dora now, if never before, knew that it was hers to give or to refuse. A woman's heart was waking within her, and while it stirred and beat with a force so fresh and strange that she knew not whether to call it pleasure or pain, she felt that he who had waked it had at the same moment, by the very same deed, secured it to himself. It was hers, yet not hers, for it was his. In revealing to her his own feelings he had also revealed her own. She bent down her burning face and buried it in her hands as though to hide from the roses round the window and the purple sky beyond them the wonderful sacred secret that Angus Campbell had asked for her heart, and that she had given it away.

It was strange that evening to go down to the familiar room and take her accustomed place

with everything so unchanged around and so utterly transformed within her. She could not hear his step now without colouring deeply, and to look in his face seemed an absolute impossibility. But his own unaltered manner restored her before long to a degree of self-possession which at first she would have believed wholly unattainable, and she was presently able to remember that the thoughts which were now oppressing her as marvellous could be no novelty to him. He must have been well acquainted with his own wishes before he had conveyed them to her; and with this reflection a fresh light fell upon his past conduct. It had not then been chance nor the influence of friendly habit that had placed him so constantly beside her. He had chosen that place deliberately, he had wished to win her, all unworthy as she was! The thought brought calmness to her agitated spirit, and in all he did and said throughout the evening she felt as though a protecting hand were over her. Her dreams that night were rather waking than sleeping, yet the morning came too soon, since it was to be the last. The early breakfast was a hurried one; the carriages were soon standing at the door. All was ready, the parting hour had come.

‘Off at last!’ said Lady Campbell as her carriage was driven from the door. ‘What a comfort!’

Harold sprang into the second, where Dora was already seated.

‘Good-bye again, Campbell,’ he cried. ‘You say I may look you up when I come to town?’

‘Be sure you do.’ Angus had moved round to the other side of the carriage, and was standing beside the door.

‘You will take a piece of Glenarchie away with you, Miss Vaughan? You will not refuse the Campbell badge?’

He unfastened the myrtle from his bonnet and held it towards her. In silence she took it, in silence she felt the strong grasp with which he placed it in her trembling hand, but the eyes that were resting on her face she could not see, her own were too full to be raised, and as the horses moved on, and the boys were waving a last farewell, Dora’s head was bent lower and lower till her lips had touched the myrtle spray, and bright drops stood glittering upon its dusky leaves. How different a creature was borne down the Highland glen on that autumn morning to the happy, careless girl who had passed up it in radiant spirits only six weeks before! The blossom had opened now, and could never be a bud again.

That afternoon saw them at Glasgow, where Sir Malcolm was waiting to receive them, happy as any schoolboy at being released from his unwelcome labours. Not less happy did the sight

of him make at any rate one of the party, and the 'Effie, my poor dear child, how are you?' with which he welcomed his little daughter fell like music on her ears. Her father would understand, her father would sympathise, and she clung round his neck in happy confidence, certain that she had in him one who would share all her feelings, nor ever blame her for grieving over the dreadful prosperity which had unexpectedly fallen upon her.

For a time the conversation could only be general, but so soon as the door had closed behind the younger travellers, Sir Malcolm at once turned to his wife.

'How is Dora?' he asked. 'She looks pale and tired to-day.'

'As well as anybody need wish to be! Travelling under such a sun may make anyone look tired; we are all wretched objects, I dare say.'

She turned to the glass to confront a face which looked as though it had never known a day's illness or an hour's fatigue.

'A wretched object!' said Sir Malcolm laughing. 'No, my dearest, I can't so far flatter you! But you really are satisfied that Dora goes home happy and strong?'

'Surely, Malcolm, you can judge for yourself whether she has had enough to make her happy or not, and as she can walk half-a-dozen miles

in the day without being tired, I suppose she is strong. What are you thinking of?’

Sir Malcolm mused for a few moments. ‘His returning to Glenarchie was not what I could have most wished,’ he said; ‘but at such a moment of course I could say nothing. It would have been cruel to detain him longer at Kildrummie without an absolute necessity, which did not exist.’

‘Who—Angus? Of course he would return to us. You are not going back to that old fancy now? Really, I should have thought that you have had enough to put it out of your head by this time.’

‘My business has not been so interesting as to prevent my thoughts from being constantly at Glenarchie, I can assure you.’

‘But you need not think of what has no existence! Dora has shown no particular interest in Angus at any time; while he was away she scarcely mentioned him, and appeared to think it was of very little consequence who had Kildrummie.’

‘You are satisfied of this?’

‘Perfectly; so pray be satisfied too; and do at last tell me all I am dying to know about this wonderful will.’

On this point, however, Sir Malcolm, though willing to tell all he knew, proved to have but little to communicate. The will had been very

recently made, a previous will having been destroyed at the time that this one was drawn up, but though he had questioned the solicitor, the lady companion, and the servants, nothing that he had gathered from them had enabled him to form the least idea as to why his aunt should have changed her original intentions and left the whole of her property to a little girl whom she had seldom seen and never professed to care for. This was as well for Sir Malcolm's own peace of mind. Had he not had to deal with douce canny Scotch folk, capable of keeping a quiet tongue in their heads, his present regret would have been considerably increased by discovering that his own second marriage had been the real cause of his aunt's sudden change of purpose.

Though jealous and suspicious of all attentions from those outside her family, the old lady none the less deeply resented the absence of those which she looked upon as her due from her own relations, and had therefore been deeply offended with the new Lady Campbell for scarcely so much as recognising her existence. A highly coloured report of Di's behaviour to Effie, proceeding from below stairs, had reached her ears through the same uncertain channel, and in violent wrath that an Englishwoman should dare to domineer over a Campbell, she resolved to bestow upon her great-niece that which she devoutly believed must win reverence from all.

‘Even that stepmither would no dare flout her noo, and as for the laddie—why, her ain was her ain, and men folk must fash for theirsels.’ Such was the secret history of the whim of an old woman which made Effie an heiress and Angus a disinherited man.

Great was the satisfaction at Hurst and Hanger when the young travellers returned to their respective homes, though Charles Merivale could stay but a few days at his before returning to Eton, a journey which must be taken for the first time alone. Pupil room and playing-field would know Harold no longer. He was to await his commission at home; and whatever separation the future might have in store for the brother and sister, they would now be able to enjoy each other’s company for a longer period than any which they had spent together since that early Indian life which had grown dim in the memories of both.

Had the good vicar ever doubted the wisdom of his experiment in opening his doors to the little orphans ten years ago, nothing better than the visit to Glenarchie could have been devised to assure him of it. Weary, indeed, had been the many lonely meals, to be got through with no better companions than Smut, Snow, and the newspaper. If he had put up with the same life contentedly in former years, it could only have been because he knew no better.

No one with such a heart and such a nature as Uncle John could lose bright young faces and happy young voices from under his roof without being keenly alive to the loss. Nothing but a conviction that his boy and girl were enjoying themselves to the utmost had kept him from lamenting their unwonted absence; and now he looked fondly and proudly from one to the other, rubbing his hands in secret glee at the thought that here they were again, at home for good and all. Harold would be leaving presently, but only to return constantly—any long and serious absence not being contemplated by his cheerful soul, which never dwelt on future possible trouble, and as to Dora, had she been eight instead of eighteen, Uncle John, in his innocence, could hardly have been less apprehensive of any prince appearing to carry the princess away. That Dora should marry some day he would have owned to be highly desirable, but some day is no day in particular, and never need give us the slightest anxiety. Certainly he saw no cause for any at present; there was Dora, just as she had been when she left home; looking perhaps a little taller, a trifle more dignified in her ways—when Harry was not by to laugh at her—but with nothing in her appearance or conduct to betray any inward revolution of feeling, nor to tell her uncle how much his little girl had left behind her on the

moors at Glenarchie. In his eyes, and in those of Lady Merivale, she had become, and was still becoming, everything they had hoped to see her, and the verdict of less partial observers was equally favourable. The great Phil himself was heard to remark more than once during this autumn that ‘from the way little Dora had come on in the course of the last six months he really should not be astonished if she did uncommonly well for herself by-and-by—especially if Di could be induced to give her a turn or two in London when the season began.’

Whatever London might do for her in the future it was not on its gaieties that Dora’s thoughts were fixed. The prospect of the Christmas county ball, where she was to make her first appearance, sufficed for present happiness, as then, no doubt, it was intended that Mr. Campbell should make one of the party from the Hanger. Then they would meet, not at the ball alone, but in quieter moments, when the intercourse of the past might be for a short time revived. So profound was her trust in his sincerity that she never even wished for a renewal of the conversation on the terrace. He had made known his position as well as his wishes; she was sure that he had meant to convey to her the absolute necessity of waiting. It was well—to wait was not hard; if only she might see him now and then, that was all she

would ask for. Not in idle dreams nor ungrateful repinings should her time be passed, but in diligent endeavours to learn everything and to become everything that might make her in time less unworthy of him. She would strive to prepare herself for a destiny not the less sure because very far away. Day by day the future rose before her eyes as the distant blue mountains of some unknown land rise before the eyes of a traveller who knows not yet the paths that conduct to them, nor the untrodden tracts that must be crossed before they can be reached, yet believes that there will be found the end of his journey and the ultimate goal of his hopes.

CHAPTER XV.

L'absence est à l'amour
Ce qu'est au feu le vent :
Il éteint le petit,
Il allume le grand.

THE morning sun was casting a carpet of light and shade over the velvet lawn and bright flower-beds of Hurst Grange early on a sultry July day. Miss Goode, appearing at the drawing-room window, beckoned to two muslin-clad figures in the shadow of the trees at a little distance. Effie saw her, and ran across the lawn.

‘A letter from papa,’ she cried. ‘Why,’ as Miss Goode put it into her hand, ‘how strange ; it is for Dora.’

Dora, who had followed more slowly, took and opened the letter. Effie could scarcely allow her time to read it.

‘What does he say?’ she cried. ‘Does he say more about baby? Oh! Dora, do tell me.’

‘Sir Malcolm asks me to come to Grosvenor Square for a little while.’ The colour rose in Dora’s cheeks as she spoke.

‘Indeed,’ said Miss Goode, ‘is Lady Campbell able to receive you?’

‘Yes, she is so well that he wants her to have a companion. There is the letter. I must ask Uncle John about it.’

Hurst had opened its hospitable doors to the present guests some time ago, and it was now nearly three weeks since Effie had been made supremely happy by learning that she possessed a little brother. This was a most gratifying event to the house of Campbell; the only possible fault that could be found with the new-comer being, that he was detaining his parents in London just as the rest of the world was leaving it. Di seemed so unwilling to submit to authority in this respect that Sir Malcolm, eager to persuade her to remain quiet for a reasonable time, had written to beg that Hurst Grange would add to its many acts of kindness by sparing Dora to them as a companion during the next week or ten days, urging it, as he said, entirely as a favour to themselves, and trusting that Dora would forgive them for inviting her to pay what he feared must prove but a dull visit.

It was no dread of dulness that filled Dora’s mind as she prepared to obey Sir Malcolm’s summons. The thousands who might be quitting London were nothing to her; the one person to whom all her thoughts turned would not, she felt sure, be leaving it at present. And it was almost a year since she had seen him! Christ-

mas had come and gone, and had brought no Mr. Campbell to the Hanger. He had been invited, but by a mistake between Sir Philip and his wife, only a short notice had been sent, producing in return a note full of regrets. Mr. Campbell had already accepted an invitation for the same week. In deep and silent disappointment Dora had listened to the note read at luncheon like any other note, as though there were nothing especially interesting about it. He was not coming! After so much hoping, he was not coming! For a few days she had felt almost unable either to believe or to bear it. But it could not be helped, and now she must begin to face with patience and hope a fresh term of separation, to last she knew not how long. She did her best to be brave and cheerful, and if her step grew slower, and her eye less bright, no one was surprised, for Harold was about to leave home and join his regiment, so that any failure of spirits on his sister's part appeared to all a very natural result. Months had passed since that time; months in which she had done her best to draw strength and comfort from remembrance of the past and hope for the future. She must be patient, as he was, yet it was impossible altogether to suppress a longing to see him again, if only for a single hour. This desire was now at last to be granted—since it could not be

doubted that she would meet him in his brother's house in Grosvenor Square.

The next day brought her there in safety to receive a warm welcome both from its master and mistress. Sir Malcolm could not sufficiently thank her for this ready response to his summons, and Di herself was very complaisant. Her lips wore a softer smile than usual, as she watched her husband delightedly exhibiting his son and heir to their young guest, though she did not scruple to declare that he was, like every other baby, portentously ugly; while the proud father laughed, and prophesied that he would be a bonnie laddie in a very few years' time.

Sir Malcolm's gratitude for Dora's presence soon showed itself by unwearied endeavours to procure for her every amusement that the circumstances of the household and lateness of the season rendered possible. The afternoons were devoted to Di; but of picture galleries and flower shows in the mornings, and concerts or plays in the evenings, Dora found she might have an unlimited amount. To think that she was pleased was so evident a pleasure to her kind host that she let him lead her about as he liked, caring very little herself whether she went or stayed at home, for Angus was nowhere to be met with, nor did he come to Grosvenor Square. He had been there once or twice, she found, not long before

her own arrival, his goings and comings being mentioned as common things, while to her they were the one and only important thing in all London. Sometimes, as she accompanied Di in the short daily drive which the doctor by this time permitted, she would lean forward, with an earnest wistful gaze, as though the face on which her hopes were set must surely be found at last among the moving myriads around her ; then she would sink back with a sigh of disappointment, soon to rouse herself, and gaze again. In such a state she could be little capable of receiving amusement, and would have been glad had Sir Malcolm not insisted on those perpetual efforts in search of it, which soon showed her that ceaseless variety may be only another name for the dreariest kind of monotony. Still, all was so kindly meant, and so courteously done, that she could not but be ashamed of her own ingratitude, and force herself to feign if not to feel an interest in everything which he took so much pains to show her. It was well that she should practise self-restraint and outward calmness, for a time was coming when both would be urgently needed.

She had not been a week in London when, on entering the drawing-room one afternoon, she saw Sir Malcolm and Di engaged in earnest conversation. She retreated to the inner room with a book, but, before long, Di's voice was making itself very audible.

‘Certainly, I shall tell her. Why should I not? Dora, come here.’

Sir Malcolm hastily took a note from his wife’s hand. ‘Stay, my dear, I am not sure; perhaps we had better say nothing at present.’

‘Nonsense, Malcolm! do you really suppose I am going to hold my tongue all this afternoon? It is no secret, you see, now everything is settled with the Colonel. Who is going to be married, Dora? Guess.’

‘It is a person—a gentleman—someone you know well,’ said Sir Malcolm nervously.

Dora felt as though a hand of ice had been suddenly laid upon her heart

‘A relation, a near relation of ours—at least of mine,’ continued he.

‘You are too bad, Malcolm, letting it out by degrees like that! there is nothing to guess now.’

‘No—of course; it is Mr. Campbell.’

To Dora it seemed as if some power within her, with which her own will and consciousness had nothing to do, had spoken these words. They were uttered with absolute calmness. Sir Malcolm turned round with extreme relief to assure himself by one hasty glance that Dora’s face was as quiet as her voice. She was speaking again.

‘And who is the lady?’

‘No one you know—a Miss Sinclair.’

‘I have seen her, then. She was at Lord’s.’

‘Yes, on horseback.’ A slight smile played over Sir Malcolm’s face as he recalled the scene, and his own words, ‘I dare say you may remember her, she is a striking-looking person.’

‘A beauty and an heiress,’ said Di triumphantly. ‘No one can say that Angus has been foolish at last.’

‘Do you—like her?’ There was a slight quiver in these words, but it passed unnoticed.

‘Oh, yes! She is a good sort of girl enough; without much to say for herself certainly—but he can do all the talking.’

‘You will have to make friends now, my love; you hardly know each other yet.’

‘I beg your pardon, I have known her these three seasons. I know very well she refused half-a-dozen offers for his sake last year, when I must say I thought it a hopeless case for her—it was the year before he was so attentive, you know; but he has come to his senses at last. St. Clare Sinclair! and now I suppose he will have to take her name.’

‘Only one of them, at all events; but I must be off at once if I am to catch him. Your love and congratulations, of course; and stay, there was something else. Oh! the concert to-night; you will go, Dora?’

She looked in his face with a bewildered expression, as though the sense of his words had not reached her mind.

‘The concert to-night,’ he repeated.

‘The concert!’ She put her hand to her head in the attitude of one trying to recall something. ‘Yes, I remember, let us go.’

‘Not unless you really wish it.’

‘I want to go—let us go,’ she repeated, with childish reiteration.

‘Certainly,’ was the ready answer, ‘I will get the tickets as I go down Bond Street; and here comes the carriage, in time for me to put you both in before I start.’

The drive was anything but a silent one. Lady Campbell had much to say on the new and interesting subject, and Dora’s answers were always prompt, more so indeed than usual, for now she never once leant forward to scan the faces of the passers-by. On their return she was ready, according to custom, to read aloud the newspaper, or the latest novel, while Di rested on the sofa, leaving her only to dress for dinner, and then came the concert. There was nothing unusual in the day’s routine to distinguish it from its fellows which had gone before, and yet years afterwards Dora could recall every little incident belonging to it—the pages of the book she read to Di—the faces of the singers at the concert—Sir Malcolm’s attitude as he folded up his brother’s note—as though all had been stamped upon her memory with hot irons.

She would have lingered in the drawing-room

on their return from the concert, but the hour was late, and her companion at once bade her good-night, with a remark on her tired face. She took the candle from his hand in passive obedience; yet paused again outside the door, and looked with a shudder up the staircase, before she began lingeringly, and as if counting every step, the slow and unwilling ascent towards her own room. Unwilling—for there was no escape now!

Throughout the day her mind had tried mechanically to seize on every passing object to fill itself with, and so shut out one haunting idea, as a drowning man might catch at passing straws or sticks to stay his progress towards the rapids, down which he knows he must shortly be dashed. Now in the silence of her own room the hour had come. She placed her candle on the table, then, turning unconsciously to the glass that stood upon it, shrank back in half-pitying wonder from the image that met her gaze, the pale cheeks, the heavy eyes, the look of hopeless grief. Sinking down by the low chair beside her, she flung her arms across it, and laid the poor pale face upon them. There, taking no note of time, she rested motionless as a marble figure, excepting that now and then a faint, weary moan, as though from one in pain, came through her parted lips, and a few, only a few, tears found their way between the closed eye-

lashes, over the white cheeks. They fell without the passion, but with all the concentrated despair, of a little child, who, having lost the one thing on which its heart was set, believes that the whole earth contains nothing worthy for a moment to be offered in exchange.

But anguish for her lost love, though the bitterest, was not the only feeling swelling within her. There was perplexity also mixed with utter amazement and bewilderment as she recalled the past. Did her senses fail?—did memory deceive her?—had not Angus's looks, words, and manner been all that she had believed them to have been? How then could this news be true? But how could it be false? written by his own hand as she knew it had been. Where was truth, where was right to be found in this maze of doubt and misery? Must not some great wrong have been committed before so great a suffering could have fallen upon her? Was the wrong on her side? if so, when—where—what had she done that was blamable? But was the wrong *not* on her side? Dora raised her head quickly, as though stung by a serpent, when this possibility rushed into her mind. Had Angus been idly playing with her—had he been false and deceitful even at the moment he had uttered those words and had turned those looks upon her? No! a thousand times no! Not unless truth and falsehood could exchange their natures. But had he

been false since—fickle—inconstant? A sharp struggle arose in her mind. Inexperienced as she was, had the case been that of another person, natural good sense and clear judgment would have pointed out the reasonable solution. But love, stronger than all, could listen to no such pleadings, and she bowed down her head once more, willing to acknowledge blind presumption, ignorant folly, or, if needful, worse faults still upon her own part; but not willing to admit a single conviction that must dim the glory of her perfect ideal. He had been kind, and she had been—worse than foolish! He had never meant to deceive! No—she had only been to him a little girl, and for fear she should imagine he could have intended more than friendship he had in all honesty and wisdom kept away from the Hanger. And she had presumed on a few ordinary words and looks, had forgotten her own insignificance and the superior worth of others who might be supposed to be more nearly on equality with him! This was the manner in which she must think of the past!

But though the depth of Dora's humility might be useful in stifling her doubts, it could be of no avail in diminishing her sufferings. Wisely or unwisely, she had with her love given her whole happiness into the keeping of another. The new life that had sprung up

within her must be crushed ; but what strong young life can be crushed without agony ? Her love and her life seemed to herself inextricably twined together ; what could the one be worth without the other—for what should she live now ? Her brother, her uncle, all her friends were alike forgotten in that supreme moment, or remembered only with the heart-rending conviction that never again could she be a pleasure or a comfort to anyone. ‘God have pity, let me die to-night.’ This was the only sound that passed her lips, the only prayer her heart could frame, as she sat on, unconscious of the flight of time.

There are some old familiar words whose truth is best proved when trials are severest—‘Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.’ A Father’s ear cannot be closed to a child’s bitter cry, even though that cry be uttered in a wild delirium of fever. Slowly, but surely, as ocean waves sink down after a storm, the tumult of misery in her soul gave way to strange calmness, born, as it would seem, of no earthly cause. She rose at last, and opening her window looked out upon the silent summer night. All was stillness and darkness below ; at two in the morning the great city, full of ceaseless life by day, lies quiet and motionless, as though in its own grave. Such would be her own life now, henceforward, and for ever. Then she raised her

eyes above, to the myriad stars which, unseen in the daylight, now covered the violet heavens with wreaths of glory and majesty. Was there nothing to live for, even though earth were for ever dark? Were not those stars shining above countless graves of men and women who, suffering long, unseen by all but God, now looked back to the scene of their conflicts, to confess with one voice that all had yet been well?

She turned away, and lying down at length, was wrapped before long in a merciful sleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

Thy dim presence who can understand
Thou Being with no attribute? . . .
Like the dim mountain mist hiding a land
Our feet have never trod, whose hills arose
Beauteous between the glowing tranquil line,
Of morning light and the tumultuous sea.

To 'Disappointment.'

DORA's sleep lasted till the morning sun was high, and when she unclosed her eyes and the events of the past day rushed back upon her mind something of the peace of that last hour came with them, giving her strength to rise and face whatever the new day might bring, with a silent desire to bear it all in patience.

To think of Angus—no, of Mr. Campbell—as she ought to think of him now, as the property of another, was her duty, and should be her constant endeavour. But how could a few hours undo the work of a whole year, or blot out the picture which was so deeply impressed on her heart? This could not be—yet the picture must be painted no more, and under Time's decaying touch it would by-and-by crumble to pieces. So Reason argued, while Love refused to believe her.

Before long a burning desire had arisen within her to see Angus once more. Could she but see him, as it would be her duty to think of him henceforward, by the side of his future wife, she felt persuaded that her task would be an easier one. Once more, if only for a few minutes, to see him by the side of his affianced wife. Then her task would be easier ; then, for the future, she should be able to picture him to herself as she ought to do. Only once more—he had spoken of one more meeting—surely it could not be wrong to ask for it !

The days passed on without bringing him, and every day her wish grew stronger. She was not now the only guest in Grosvenor Square ; Charles Merivale had come up, as on the previous year, to attend the school matches at Lord's. Was it possible that only one year ago she had been there also, as happy as he ? while now, for the first time in her life, his society gave her not the least pleasure ; his mirth seemed tiresome, his excitement foolish. Charlie, on his side, was almost hurt by Dora's unaccountably languid interest in the fate of Eton, and her constant refusal to accompany him to the cricket-ground even for so much as one single afternoon. Ten days had passed since her visit began, and the eleventh, a Saturday, would see it end, as Di was now permitted

to travel, and the whole party would repair to the country without delay.

Late in the afternoon of the previous day, as they sat together in the drawing-room while Dora read aloud, the door was opened, and voices sounded without. Dora stopped and looked up. In a moment her heart gave a great leap, then seemed as suddenly to cease beating. Mr. Campbell, Colonel Sinclare and his daughter were all entering together.

Di, rising with an exclamation of pleased surprise, received very graciously Colonel Sinclare's courteous apologies for what he termed a bold intrusion. But they had all been at Lord's, they had met Sir Malcolm, who had encouraged him to believe that he might venture to ask for her, and in that hope neither he nor his daughter knew how to deny themselves the pleasure of calling before she left town. Such at least to Dora's half-conscious ears seemed the tenor of his words, while she was laying down the book her trembling fingers now refused to hold. She was named—she had to look up and bow; then to take a well-known hand, and find some answer to a slight but cordial greeting, before she was free to retreat to a seat at a little distance and mechanically to take up a roll of Di's worsted work which lay upon the table. Here, while apparently intent only upon counting

stitches and matching colours, she could force herself into outward indifference, and listen with no apparent emotion to the voice which, by day or by night, had haunted her dreams. At last she ventured to raise her head and survey the group before her.

Colonel Sinclare was in full flow of conversation with Lady Campbell; of his daughter she could only see the faultless, clearly-cut profile, equally perfect, whether seen as formerly, beneath the straight lines of her riding-hat, or as now, surrounded with white lace and roses. Perfect—but expressionless, until Angus, who was seated a little way behind her, bent forward with some low remark. Then she turned with a glow as bright as her own roses, and a look which revealed in a moment a whole world of hidden feeling. Dora saw it—her wish had been granted; she had seen them together, and now what was left to her but to creep away, like a butterfly with broken wings, out of the sunshine of their brilliant happiness? Could she have gone that moment she would have done so, but as she half rose the door opened again and Sir Malcolm entered. There were fresh greetings and fresh expressions of pleasure; then, as he and the colonel retired to a distant window, and while Di was engaged with her future sister-in-law, Angus himself moved forward and deliberately drew near to Dora's corner.

She did not look up, and he stood for a few moments in silence, waiting for a glance or a word. He waited in vain. She neither spoke nor ceased the work on which her eyes were bent. After a short pause, with a voice intended to be entirely unembarrassed, he inquired for her uncle.

She thanked him. He was well.

For her brother? Again Dora answered with grave politeness.

Why would she not raise her eyes? they had not always been so shy of meeting his! The long, entranced gaze in the boat on Loch Archie, the lovely downcast glances of the last evening, were not so long ago that he had forgotten their beauty. A changed Dora was a thing he had, for every reason, no desire to find. He must make her talk—he must be satisfied she was really unaltered since last year.

‘Your brother is in Ireland, I think,’ he said, taking a seat beside her.

‘Yes, in the south of Ireland.’

‘No very formidable distance at present. I hope you do not feel that you have lost him yet?’

‘No, it is not far.’

‘When did he join?’

‘About a month after Christmas.’

‘I so exceedingly regretted not being able to accept Lady Merivale’s kind invitation at Christmas. I had been quite reckoning on the pleasure—but fate was against me.’

There was an unusual hesitation in his manner, but Dora, engaged with her own inward struggles, perceived nothing beyond them.

‘Oh! That was unfortunate.’

The cold measured tones were becoming every minute more unbearable to him. She should speak, she must look at him.

‘How industrious you are, Miss Vaughan! I did not remember that you were such a determined worker.’

No answer.

‘And in this weather too! which makes everybody else idle.’

‘Yes, it has been very hot.’

‘Dreadful! in London especially. I have been quite thankful to get down to Richmond for a breath of air every evening lately. Have you not been wishing yourself back at Glenarchie?’

He had succeeded now. Her work fell upon her lap; she raised her head, for a moment her eyes rested upon his, then went wandering round the room with a sad, lost expression, while she answered with startling earnestness.

‘*Glenarchie?* No!’

In another moment she had recollected herself, and seized the friendly work once more, but a painful crimson flush was mounting from cheek to brow, even to the very roots of her hair. Had she been able to look up, she might have seen a

slight reflection of the same on her companion's face.

He sat by her for another minute in absolute silence, when, to the relief of both, Miss Sinclair rose to take leave. Parting words were exchanged. Dora rose with the rest. She touched his hand once more. They were gone—it was over. Sir Malcolm attended his guests downstairs and assisted Miss Sinclair to her carriage. Angus stood by in silence.

‘You are coming back with us, Campbell, are you not?’ said Colonel Sinclair, as he followed his daughter to the carriage.

Mr. Campbell excused himself. He must call for letters at his club, he might be detained, he would follow them in another hour; then, as the carriage drove away, with a hasty good-bye to his brother, he turned and walked quickly away.

He reached his club, to fling himself down in an arm-chair in a quiet corner, where, with his hat drawn down over his eyes, and a pile of unopened letters at his side, he might have been taken for a penniless man pursued by bills, rather than for a successful suitor, with every form of happiness opening before him. Certainly no lately accepted lover need desire to be haunted by the problem now troubling his mind. Why should that single look from Dora's eyes have made him leave his brother's house by many degrees less

comfortable than he had felt himself to be on entering it?

It was a question not to be easily settled, and as he lay back in silent thought, he too was sending his mind over the space of a twelve-month, and filling his memory with images of the past. But all was done with a strong though unacknowledged determination to find nothing blamable in his own conduct, and those who set out with this resolution will generally be able to succeed. There could at any rate have been nothing wrong in going to Glenarchie in the first instance, nor in showing proper attention to any young lady he might find there. Malcolm's remonstrances did indeed rise to his mind—but on this point Malcolm was crazy. He had certainly done nothing to deserve them then!

But when he came to his return from Kildrummie, conscience was more hardly tasked to tell a flattering tale. Not even to himself could he deny whose face had shone before his eyes, whose voice had sounded in his ears wherever he had turned in those dreary old rooms at Kildrummie, nor forget the strength of the longing that had brought him back to Dora's side as quickly as possible. But who would not have done the same with the same temptation? And if the resolutions of prudence, caution, and wise reflection on his altered position had been all or gotten at the sight of her, what could be

said, but that flesh is weak, and ‘Beauty such a mistress of the world’?

Not for a moment would Angus admit to himself that he had played a deceiving part. His admiration and regard had been most sincere, but his position, with which Miss Vaughan was perfectly well acquainted, had debarred him from that freedom of choice which belonged to richer men. So he now desired to think, but would not ask himself how far this view coincided with his actions, either on the last evening, or last morning, they had spent together in the Highlands, or with moments that had occasionally followed these, when any amount of working and waiting had seemed possible, to enable him to gain the treasure he had very sincerely desired to win. But to follow out this desire with unshaken steadfastness required abilities which, able as he was, Angus did not possess. It called for self-denial of a high order, involving a willingness to take a less prominent place in popular favour, and that he should no longer seek to be, wherever he was, the favourite of the hour. Here was his weakness; through this temptation came. While it was impossible for him not to perceive, on his return to London, that his changed prospects had brought a corresponding change in the manner of some, it was doubly gratifying to observe only increased cordiality in the reception of others.

To feel that he was now valued for himself alone, was the most delicate compliment he could well receive, and foremost among these constant friends came the Sinclares.

Colonel Sinclair's form of pride—it was one in which, being a rich man, he could afford to indulge—was to think highly of family and distinctions, and nothing at all of money. Indeed, a son-in-law, who, himself of good birth, would take his daughter's name, and consent to become a Sinclair, would be the most acceptable one he could find. His own fancy, and, as he truly believed, his daughter's affection, had alike fixed upon Angus, as able to fulfil every necessary condition; and whatever one gentleman may properly do to induce another to become his son-in-law had been done by Colonel Sinclair for many months past. The siege had been laid with all due formalities, and the castle had yielded by degrees.

On Angus' side, it had been in the beginning a matter of consideration and calculation rather than of feeling. The lady was beautiful, rich, well-born, accomplished; to crown all, he even believed her to be amiable—and beyond a doubt she liked him. Dora's good qualities he had never thought of cataloguing, but Clare's would, in leisure moments, be carefully reckoned up and their sum total quietly contemplated. There should be no undignified haste on his side. Why

need there be? Though he might hope, by-and-by, to be happy with her, there could be no doubt that at present he was perfectly well able to be happy without her, and it concerned his own pride that, in this matter of marrying an heiress, all the world should see he was the sought rather than the seeker. Even when his mind was made up he still delayed addressing Miss Sinclare until an heir had been born to Glenarchie. Then, with his own position definitely fixed, he offered himself, in all the pride of poverty, to one whose silent desire, as he more than suspected, had long been to bestow upon him everything she possessed.

There is an inequality in marriage greater than any which a difference of fortune can present. The union of Angus to Miss Sinclare would be an unequal one in a truer sense than that which the world is accustomed to affix to the term. The hour that witnessed their engagement brought some glimmering of this truth to one of them. For the first time in his life he saw a woman's heart unveiled before him, and not without a sense of shame at the poorness of his own offering in comparison with the wealth of hers. Touched by so constant and so tender a love as he had found had long been his, he honestly resolved to do his best to return it, and for some days past had persuaded himself that it was extremely improbable he should have

been happier with any other wife than he intended to be with Clare. On such a persuasion the events of the last half-hour had had an unfortunate effect. Do what he would, he could not at once shut out those beautiful, mournful eyes from his memory, nor forget that low and painful cry. He had seen a pale, sorrow-struck Dora, and it was in vain that he struggled against the conviction that the change was owing to himself alone.

She had loved him, then—had been loving him ever since they parted! A strange mixture of emotions filled his breast at the thought. Pride, shame, joy, remorse, were wrestling there together, all drowned at last in a bitter regret, whether for himself or for her he would have found it hard to say. The depth and extent of Clare's affection had taught him a much-needed lesson, namely, that a woman's love is no more to be trifled with than her life itself,—the experience of to-day had repeated it, and the self-reproach with which he felt that this sin had been his was for a time so keen as to silence every other feeling. And it must remain unexpressed—he could ask no forgiveness! They who might have shared every emotion together must henceforward be entire strangers, for something warned Angus that if he was to hope for happiness with Clare, it must be in a life from which Dora should be entirely shut out. Such

feelings as he now suffered from could not be too quickly extinguished. For himself he could be prudent, and was firmly resolved not to fail; would that he had been so for her also, and had refrained from returning to Glenarchie!

But self-reproach is too unpleasant a guest to be welcomed by anyone, especially in those hearts little used to harbour it. Soon came the consoling reflection that after all it was probable no very lasting harm had been done. Dora was but just nineteen, an age at which a little time, a little change, or at the very worst a fresh admirer, is always supposed to have power to heal a wounded heart. One so charming as she was sure to attract, and it might reasonably be hoped would soon find, a charmer herself. In six months or a year's time she might meet him with a smiling face and a new name. He must hope it—he would hope it—and when he thought of other girls' histories, the hope soon passed into a cheerful expectation, and he could rise, stretch his long, folded arms, consult his watch, and turn in tolerable spirits to the letters lying unread beside him.

And what was she about, the little girl whose life was so soon to be restored by some fresh spring of joy and hope?

No sooner had the visitors taken their leave than Di, declaring she was tired to death, retired to her own room to rest, and Dora was left alone,

standing motionless while the sounds of departure died away below.

Suddenly a light step and merry whistle were heard outside, and Charlie entered the room.

‘See!’ he cried; ‘they’ve been unpacking a hamper of ferns from Scotland down-stairs, and I found this among the moss.’

The next moment he had put into her hand a piece of the sweet wild myrtle, fragrant and fresh as a breath of Highland air itself. For one instant only she held it, the next—it was flung across the room, and Dora sank down in a flood of tears, more bitter and overpowering than any which she had shed since the dreadful truth had reached her. The touch, the sight, above all the sweet, familiar fragrance of those dark green leaves, brought back to sudden life the vanished scenes of a twelvemonth ago. Again, as though it had been but yesterday, she heard the murmur of the oars and saw the dark eyes lingering upon her own; again she felt the wild breeze sweeping over her brow, while purple moor and mountain peak rose up before her sight. Back rushed, with all the vividness of reality, the last evening on the terrace, half sweet, half sad—the parting hour; the low farewell and long pressure of a hand that had left in hers the Campbell badge—the myrtle branch! That myrtle had faded, the promise she had gathered from it was dead. Oh! cruel Charlie, to mock

her by offering a second—what could it ever bring her now but bitter remembrances of vanished joy!

In vain he stooped over her with questions of dismay and distress; she only turned to hide her face more deeply on the cushions until he ceased, and waited in silence while the heavy sobs slowly wore themselves away. When at last she looked up he was standing beside her with a glass of water in his hand, and, after making her take a little, he began to bathe her heated forehead in silence. Soothed at last by the cool gentle touches, she presently said or sighed, 'Thank you.'

'What is it?' he whispered back, bending down with a face as innocently unsuspecting as any little child's; 'has anything made you ill?'

'Yes,' she murmured.

'But how? What is it?'

'I am tired.'

'But there must be something else.'

'London is so hot. I want to go home and rest.'

'You have done too much for Di, then. Shall I go and tell her you are ill?'

'Oh no! Tell no one! Promise me.'

He hesitated. Would it be right to conceal an illness which had developed two such extraordinary symptoms—tears, and an unwillingness to attend the school matches?

‘Promise me,’ she repeated, fixing her eyes upon him with an earnest gaze.

‘I’ll promise, then, if you will promise one thing too. When you go home will you have Mr. Lister if you don’t get well soon?’

A ghost of a smile parted Dora’s lips. What could all the doctors in the world do for her?

‘I promise,’ she said. ‘But I shall be well now—soon.’

She rose and walked with a weak slow step to the door, there to turn round once more. ‘You have promised, Charlie. *Remember!*’

Charlie remembered his word and kept it. Much as he would have liked to consult his mother on the subject of Dora’s strange malady, the wish was at all times honourably resisted.

Dora’s word was also kept. So far as could be told, she returned home ‘well.’ Some early sunshine might have left her face for ever, but it was too young and too fair to bear much trace of the desolation her heart had undergone. No one who watched her in her home at Hurst could have guessed that life now seemed to stretch itself before her like a barren desert, across which it would be her lot to wander—always alone.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

There surely lives in man and beast,
Something divine that warns them of their foes,
And such a sense, when first I fronted him,
Cried 'Trust him not.'—TENNYSON'S *Sea Dreams*.

CAN any time in England compare with a long perfect spring day? Not early spring, with its smiling face and cold heart, but when the bitter winds have blown themselves away, and the rains have fallen and left the heavens blue. Hanger Hall never looked so lovely as when May had half buried its mellow red walls in soft masses of blossom, and spread a sea of meadow flowers far and wide around them. Then in the long, sweet evenings the nightingale notes were heard; each rugged, twisted thorn stood forth a rosy snowdrift; the bees hummed, the small birds sang, the long silky grasses went waving up the hill to woodland regions, where cuckoos' voices, like silver bells, answered each other from copse to copse. Such a May was breathing round it now, seven years after Lady

Campbell's marriage. Seven years—a little lifetime! Yet they count for little in a life of centuries, scarcely bringing a fresh stain upon lichened walls, or a fuller foliage to the 'immemorial' elms. We must turn to humanity to comprehend the power of time.

Down through the Hanger woods when the afternoon shadows were lengthening fast came the quick light step of a man who had been a boy seven years before. His merry song rang through the trees as he followed a winding foot-path that led to a gate in the high park paling, which divided the woods from the road that skirted them. But the 'Braes o' Balquhiddie' broke off abruptly as the singer came to a sudden halt. Before him was an unexpected sight. Many yards of the strong oak paling had been torn from their place and partially broken. The fresh moss was much trampled, and some young trees had been injured. It was a strange scene of havoc on such a bright spring day.

'Why, Robins—what has happened? When was this done?'

A keeper and a woodman, who had been shaking their heads over the ruin, now raised them, and touched their caps.

'This last blessed night, sir.'

'But who did it?'

Robins again shook his head, and pointed over his shoulder down the road. 'Them as

does all the mischief as *is* done about the place, Mr. Charlie—they hammering rascals.’

‘What, the foundrymen?’

‘Them rascals it was, sir, I’d take my oath. Jim and I came upon it first thing this morning, and as Sir Philip and you was out for the night, I’ve just let ’em be, that you might see it all with your own eyes.’

Charles Merivale walked up to the fallen palings and examined the place.

‘There is no use in leaving them any longer,’ he said at last. ‘Sir Philip will be vexed enough when he hears of it; but get them up, if you can, before he comes this way.’

Robins was an old servant, and privileged to grumble.

‘What, sir? Not have the law of that ’ere Grover?’

‘You don’t imagine he did it himself?’

‘And if he didn’t, mightn’t he have stopped the men? Mightn’t he have stopped their thieving, poaching ways, this whole winter through? The eggs and eggs they’ve took, and—don’t nobody tell me he doesn’t set ’em on! Why, I heerd th’ other day as he ’llowed a couple of shilling a week to the wife of that chap as we caught in Down Copse last winter all the while he was in gaol—him as is the tightest man for his money in all Arnborough! What d’ye say to that, sir?’

‘Why, I should say that the poor woman was very glad of the money.’

‘And did he do it for that? Not he! ’Twas just to encourage the whole lot of them and to spite Sir Philip. ’Tis all along of cutting off that water, Mr. Charlie—that’s——’

Charlie turned away. ‘That’s Sir Philip’s affair, Robins. Get the palings up as fast as you can; there are some cut out in the wood-yard, I know.’

He sprang across the gap into the road and pursued his path, but without the song. A few minutes brought him to the beginning of a lane, which entered the road at right angles. Here he paused and looked about him.

It was a lane that a little while ago had led to one of the prettiest nooks in the neighbourhood; a strip of green meadow land surrounded by copses, with the bright, silvery Arne sparkling through them, its banks hidden by river flowers, the home of shy water-rats and glancing kingfishers, visited only by haymakers and shepherd boys, and by those who, like Charles Merivale, know by heart every corner of the country that lies round their home. This land, unlike every other piece of land round about, did not belong to Sir Philip, but was owned by an old man, living at a distance. It was known that it would be sold at his death, and as Mr. Brown, Sir Philip’s man of business in Arnborough, had

long ago been instructed to buy it the first moment it was in the market, Sir Philip had long ago looked upon it as virtually his own. Unlucky Mr. Brown! Injured Sir Philip! Little did they foresee that the old proprietor would die without giving anyone the least notice, and still less that the land would be immediately sold by private contract to an Arnborough man who had long been secretly plotting to obtain it. Sir Philip's indignation against his unfortunate agent knew no bounds when he found, not only that the land had gone, but that it had been bought by the very man whom he would have least wished should become its owner.

The purchaser was a certain Jonas Grover, a violent Radical with insolent manners; a large blacksmith and ironworker in Arnborough, whose business, being chiefly wholesale, and conducted with firms at a distance, laid him under no necessity of showing respect to the neighbouring gentry, whom it was his habit to describe as bloated aristocrats to admiring audiences in low public-houses. To Sir Philip, as the principal proprietor of the neighbourhood, his manner had been particularly offensive on one or two occasions. This was the man who had bought the Long Crofts, and done so with the avowed intention of turning them into a foundry on a larger scale than he had been able to find room for close to Arnborough itself! The

offensive nuisance, with its deafening noise and desecrating smoke, was to be established in the very heart of the Hanger property—only just outside the sacred park palings themselves. The threatened buildings arose, red and hideous, and Sir Philip's wrath rose with them. The dreaded hammers fell with horrid din, and peace and quiet fled the neighbourhood. Lady Merivale might express a gentle thankfulness that the sounds reached neither the house nor the garden; such thankfulness only irritated Sir Philip. As surely as the north wind blew did he take his morning walk down the great avenue on purpose to relate at luncheon how he had heard the clash and clang, not only at the lodge gates, but half-way across the park itself. But before Sir Philip had taken half-a-dozen of his walks an idea flashed across his mind, suggesting how he might obtain for himself that remedy which he frequently remarked it was a disgrace to the laws of the country they should deny him. Grover had bought the land intending to utilise the water-power that it offered; works were being erected for the purpose. The stream, before it reached his ground, flowed through the Hanger estate. Sir Philip would cut it off!

Sir Philip did to a considerable extent cut it off, throwing a great many hundred pounds into a lake which nobody had ever wished to see any

larger, for the sole purpose of ruining Grover's plans and driving him away. His family regretted it—his brother remonstrated.

‘No use crying over spilt milk, Philip,’ was the vicar's counsel, ‘the evil is done now, and cutting off the water will only set the man's back up. He will hammer harder than ever, and hate you into the bargain.’

The advice, though sound, was perfectly useless. The business continued, though the water-power was greatly diminished, and Grover, in deadly feud, frequently swore that before long he would have the law of the purse-proud baronet. No one knew exactly what the law might in this particular case turn out to be, if he did have it; and the feud went on till the neighbourhood grew weary, and the family ashamed of the quarrel, excepting always Sir Philip himself. His resentment was constantly kept alive by the incessant complaints from his keepers respecting poachers and trespassers, Grover's workmen being in every instance the real or supposed offenders. Circumstances, however, had brought a lull of late. Other interests had arisen to draw off in some degree Sir Philip's attention, and Charlie's chief anxiety with respect to the broken paling was that his father should know as little of the event as possible. He himself, in common with most of Sir Philip's relations, would have been most thankful never to hear

Grover or his foundry alluded to again. He had never entered the place, and it was no prospect of personal pleasure that was drawing him towards it now.

The great bell was clanging out its harsh notes as a signal to cease work some hours earlier than usual—this being Saturday afternoon—and the great gate was opening for the men to pour out from the yard within. Even when the deafening clamour of the hammer ceased, a more unattractive spot could hardly be imagined. Hideous staring walls with slate roofs surrounded a tall red chimney, from which (fitting banner of the business) hung a heavy cloud of smoke dust. The yard was strewn with loose coal and rusty iron pipes with half-riveted tubes and boilers awaiting the hammer—everything, including the faces and clothes of the men who now streamed past Charlie, seeming to partake of the general griminess.

He waited till all had gone by ; then, descending the lane, entered the open gates, and for the first time found himself within the foundry walls. The place seemed empty. Still he advanced, looking round in search of somebody, until on turning a corner he found himself face to face with its owner.

Charlie's momentary instinct carried his hand to his straw hat ; but Grover's shining beaver gave no answering sign. He was a short thickset

man, with a sullen expression, heavy lips, and a forehead 'villainous low.' Charlie, looking at him, felt that had he been in the position of the person he came to seek, no inducement would have made him put himself for a single day in this man's power. He must, however, be spoken with.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Grover, I hope I am not intruding. I came to look for Tom Barnes.'

Grover, planted in the middle of the path, his hands in his pockets, scanned his visitor from head to foot before making any answer.

'Barnes—um—Barnes is at work.'

'I thought his work was over at this hour on Saturdays?'

'When he looks sharp, not else. So you want to speak to him, do you? What might your business be?'

Again Grover favoured his young visitor with a look more evidently offensive than before.

'Some private affairs, thank you. I can wait if he is not ready.'

'Private affairs! do you know this is private property, young man? Who asked you or any of your crew in here, I should like to know?'

Charlie drew himself up to his full height—six feet and a trifle.

'Excuse me, Mr. Grover, I need not trouble you. I can wait for Barnes outside.'

'I dare say; sneaking about the premises,'

returned Grover with an oath, 'I know what you're come for, you young hypocrite.'—And more oaths followed.

Charlie was but twenty-one, and as the blood rushed to his cheeks he felt a very strong impulse to knock the man down. Excepting from some Oxford bargee, such an address had never reached his ears before.

'What do you mean, sir,' was his instant reply, 'by using such words to me when I have done nothing to provoke them?'

'Nothing, hey—that's good; ain't you your father's son, and haven't you come here now to make Tom Barnes a spy over my men?—but if he splits on them'—here came another imprecation—'it shall be the worse for him; he may take his oath of that.'

Charlie now perceived that the man had been drinking, and his anger turned to mere disgust.

'You're mistaken, Mr. Grover,' he answered coolly, 'I came to see Barnes as a friend, on affairs of his own, and when I left the house I had not heard of the harm your men had done to my father's property last night, of which I see you are well aware yourself. Good morning, sir,' and, lifting his hat many inches higher than before, he turned on his heel and marched out of the yard.

Indignation carried him up the lane a good

deal quicker than he had come down it, till on reaching the top he heard his own name called, and turned round. A figure, without a coat, was running after him, and in another minute Tom Barnes, breathless with excitement, arrived in some very dirty shirt-sleeves.

‘You gave it him,’ he panted out, ‘you gave it him well.’

‘What—did you hear?’

‘Didn’t I? Through the office window. I only wish you had knocked him down—the brute.’

‘Come here, then!’ Charlie strode on up the lane and into a meadow, where the trees on the bank afforded a shady seat.

‘Now then, Tom,’ he said, stretching himself on the grass, ‘tell me just what you have been about for the last month?’

Tom answered not, but dropped beside him; rolling about in the grass as though to get rid of smoke and dust among the buttercups.

‘What induced you to take work under such a man as that, I can’t conceive,’ continued Charlie.

‘Is that what you’ve come to say?’

‘Yes, it is! I would have done anything rather than that, if I had been you.’

‘Ah,’ said Tom gruffly, rolling round and propping himself on his elbows, ‘I dare say. But

then you're not me, and there's a good bit of difference between us.'

There was indeed,—as great a difference as there had been long ago in Mrs. Clack's shop. Anyone who could have seen the two side by side—Charlie in his loose Oxford-grey suit, straw hat, and bright ribbon, the picture of a happy, stalwart young Englishman, and Tom, long and lank indeed, but thin, sallow, unkempt, and rather dirtier than he used to be, with a mat of rough hair falling over his dark gleaming eyes—would have wondered what possible bond there could be between the two. Their careers had been as different as their appearance—for Charlie, Eton and Oxford, and a home full of luxuries—for Tom, hard fare, rough words, many kicks, and very few halfpence. Thanks to the vicar of Hurst, and the money which he had rescued and extorted for him, he had never been left absolutely unfed or untaught up to the age of eighteen, and then, when, through the efforts of the same kind friend, a clerkship had been found for him in a large Arnborough brewery, Tom's very first earnings were devoted to hiring a lodging for himself, and leaving his grandfather's detested roof, as he firmly resolved, for ever.

It had been a hard struggle to maintain himself on his scanty pay ; but the vicar had applauded his resolution, and was always ready

with help whenever Tom's pride would let him receive it. But unluckily for Tom he possessed, not only few friends, but one very decided enemy, his own ungoverned temper. This had got him into trouble many a time, until at last a violent dispute with a fellow-clerk had brought down such a severe reproof from the manager that Tom, in a fit of anger, had resigned on the spot, about a month before the present time.

Pride and temper had kept him from applying to Mr. Merivale again, and the need of immediate employment, or the odious alternative of returning to Stone Farm, had driven him to take the only place open to him, which was Grover's. He hated it even when taking it, for he knew the character of the man, and, worse than that, he believed that it must cut him off from his only real friends. No Merivale could notice any man employed by Grover. Till now he had been accustomed never to let many weeks pass without going to Hurst Grange, visits which had been to poor Tom like glimpses into Paradise—the one connecting link with a world altogether above his own. But he dared go no longer, and Charlie's visit was the first step that had been taken towards a renewal of the intercourse which had subsisted between them since the boys had met years ago in the village shop. Charlie's feelings towards Tom were still a

curious mixture of attraction and repulsion, the two being held in solution by a strong infusion of pity. Tom's feelings in return were such as would have astonished their object not a little could he have understood their extent, Charlie not being at all given to look upon himself as a hero of romance, nor being by any means aware that there was no deed of greatness or goodness of which Tom in his private soul did not consider him to be capable. Just at present he was conscious only that his companion looked rather dirtier and more dogged than usual, for Tom was ashamed of himself, and when ashamed was certain also to be sullen. The irrepressible joy at seeing Charlie once more, which had prompted his sudden pursuit and his first greeting, was giving way before the conviction that he should now have to endure reproaches for his late conduct.

‘Why have you not come to see me?’ Charlie proceeded.

‘How was I to go up to Hurst? The vicar knows where I am, I’ll be bound; he won’t care to see me again in a hurry.’

‘You’re wrong there; he particularly wants to see you, to know what can have possibly made you come to this man.’

‘Because a fellow can’t starve. Wharton rowed me till I got in a regular passion and cut the whole concern, and then there was

nothing for it but Grover or grandfather ; and I'll die before I'll go back there.'

'Do you mean you were absolutely driven to go to such a brute? He's twenty times worse than I thought he was.'

'Saturday afternoon,' said Tom, with a twinkle in his eye. 'He's not *always* drunk. But he's a brute—always!'

'And still you stay with him?'

'What am I to do? Go to the workhouse?'

'I thought it was that. Now look here,' and Charlie took a crisp piece of folded paper from his pocket. 'Take this ; it's only five pounds, but it will keep you going till you can get something else to do, and give Grover warning this very day.'

Tom looked up with gleaming eyes, first at Charlie, then at the note ; then turned away.

'No,' he said more gruffly than before, 'thank you—no.'

'Don't say that. Take it, and we will find you something to do elsewhere. My uncle has been talking to me ; he thinks you had better make a fresh start in some other place.'

Tom was silent a moment or two, twisting a piece of grass in his finger.

'So,' he said, 'you want me to be off.'

'Shouldn't you be glad to see some place beside Arnborough? You often say you hate it.'

Again Tom's dark eyes glanced quickly at his companion, and again he said 'No.'

'At any rate you must take this. I'm sure you want it.'

'No,' and Tom rose to his feet. 'I'm not going, and I can get on as I am. But you're just as good to offer it—as good as you have been to me—ever since I was a ragged little chap; and not so very long ago, neither, perhaps, you think,' and with a quick change of tone and a comical look, he twisted round his elbows to examine the holes in either sleeve. 'But I don't know who's to mend 'em now poor old Lyddy's past threading a needle.'

'You go and see her still, don't you?'

'I should think so! I've not got so many friends that I need give up old Lyddy; and she hasn't another creature to care for. *She* wouldn't want me to go away.'

'You don't suppose we, any of us, want it, excepting for your own good.'

'No, I don't, for it wouldn't be like you; besides, I heard what you said to old Grover just now.'

'What was it?'

'Never mind; something I shan't forget though. But if I can't keep breaking out here, what should I do in a strange place without a soul to call even a friend? Not that I thought I had here half an hour ago. I didn't

think you'd look at me any more, now I've gone and sold myself to the enemy.'

'You are not sold yet; or, if you are, you must be rescued. Come up to Hurst next Saturday. My uncle wants to see you.'

Tom shook his head, rose, and turned to go, with a gruff 'Good-day to ye.'

'Come now, Tom, you say you have no friends; don't throw away such a one as he is. I'll tell him how it all was, I promise you, and he will understand.'

'Well—well; I'll come, then, and thank ye; but I must be off, or that old brute——'

He vanished with a nod, and Charles Merivale turned homewards.

CHAPTER II.

Up, Spirit of the Storm,
That courage may find some thing to perform ;
And Fortitude, whose blood disdains to freeze
At Danger's bidding, may confront the seas
Firm as the towering headland.—W. WORDSWORTH.

NOT even Sir Philip had of late been able to meditate over his wrongs with the old perseverance. Public events had arisen, the interest of which was making itself felt in every English household. The call to arms had been heard once more, waking Europe from her peace of forty years, and rousing with a new and strange power those to whom war had been known only through the softening mists of time and distance. Battles and bloodshed must be brought closer than far-off India, nearer than the long-past Peninsular campaigns, before a generation fallen upon peaceful times could comprehend their awful reality.

But now the word had gone forth—that which many had begun to declare an impossibility had happened. England was once more at war, and Hurst and Hanger had both sent out their soldiers to fight the Russians. This was but the

beginning of the time, the spring of 1854; the Crimea had not yet become in English ears a word familiar as any between Thames and Tweed, and the cruel winter with its icy horrors and lengthening death-roll was still in the future. The vicar of Hurst's bright face had not yet grown sad as he talked of his boy at Varna, and nobody saw anything particularly absurd in Sir Philip's dignified air as he discoursed on the necessity of giving Russia a sharp and severe lesson—sweeping off her armies in imagination as though they had been so many sets of poachers on his own manor—or regretted that the French were to be mixed up in the affair with us at all, in his opinion ‘a most unnecessary complication.’

But there were anxious hearts already among those the eastward-bound soldiers had left behind them. The seven years, which had only brought fuller life to the young, had turned Lady Merivale into a confirmed invalid; and though her sweet face with its smiling soft brown eyes was lovely still, it was with the fragile loveliness of premature old age. To her tender spirit the thought of all war was horrible, and the parting with her eldest son had inflicted a deeper wound than was guessed by many of those around her. Some might be able to rejoice that Phil, now Colonel Merivale, called unexpectedly to the dignity of danger and exertion, had already shown more manliness and thoughtfulness than

had yet appeared in the whole course of his life ; his mother's fond eyes, which had scarcely been able to see a fault in her firstborn, could now only weep silent secret tears over the agonising thought that they might never behold him again.

There were others round her who like herself had been forced to see their nearest and dearest go forth to danger, and for their anxieties Lady Merivale's kind heart ached almost as much as for her own. Her second daughter, Emmeline Darrell, had parted with her husband, and was now, with her three children, settled at the Hanger, not to leave it until Colonel Darrell should return to her. And there was another, a daughter in everything but name, who filled much of Lady Merivale's thoughts.

Harold Vaughan's regiment had not been among those first ordered to the East, and Dora did not know whether to rejoice at, or to regret it, when she read his letter full of ill-concealed vexation. But suddenly he himself appeared, and the first glance at his face told her the truth. He was going, and never did soldier go more joyfully. Harold had never owned to the smallest regret in his choice of a profession ; he had from the first promised to make an excellent officer, while the axiom that ' Vaughan could do anything when he chose to try ' had become as firmly established in the regiment as it had been in the old days among his Eton admirers.

The misfortune was that he chose to exert himself but seldom. The routine of barrack life made even less demand upon his real powers than the former round of school and pupil room, and, excepting on very rare occasions, had brought nothing to rouse him from his somewhat supercilious laziness, or make him show that energy which in general he professed to be keeping for the tigers in India, as the nearest approach to an enemy he was ever likely to see. To him the call to arms was as a trumpet-note awakening a sleeper; his quickened glance and doubly firm step showed the eager spirit within, longing for action and hopeful of glory. On Dora, the sister who must sit at home and wait, fell the hardest part of the task. She nerved herself to bear it, and let him go without a lamentation or a tear. If they fell afterwards, it was in secret. Lady Merivale admired, though she could not imitate, the cheerful hopeful spirit that never seemed to flag, and Dora's was not a vain effort, for she made the sunshine of two houses. An early training in the school of self-control, where she had learnt to put away all indulgence of personal feelings, had made her the better able now to share a brother's enthusiasm, instead of giving herself up to sorrowful and useless fears. Well might Uncle John think that there was no one to compare to his Dora. His opinion was shared by many round Hurst. The added

loveliness which time had brought was not to those who knew her well her chief and truest charm. This was found in the sweet unselfishness, the simplicity which no amount of admiration could spoil, the warm affection which was poured forth without stint on her home and the friends around it. Dora was happy now. She had many to care for and much to do ; life was no longer for her a barren desert, or she herself a figure wrapped in grey mist, wandering across it. The rosy hues of sunrise may fade from the landscape, and yet leave many fair colours behind them, bright in the foreground, soft in the distance, with a blue sky spread out above all.

She and her uncle had been at the Hanger this afternoon, where a little party had gathered round Lady Merivale's invalid chair in the sunny flower garden. Now most had dispersed, but Sir Philip and the Vicar were pacing up and down the raised terrace walk ; and Dora was lingering alone on the lawn. She was seated at the foot of a stone vase, full of bright flowers. The sun's rays fell on her, touching the rippling shining hair with gold. A book was in her hand, but the leaves remained unturned. A certain gravity had settled on the fair face, and in her eyes might be read an absent, far-away look. At her side slept a beautiful black retriever, Harold's property and pride. Suddenly, in one of those spasms to which canine sleep is

subject, the dog started to his feet and began sniffing about the short turf with a low, uneasy whine. Dora put out a hand and drew him towards her.

‘What,’ she said, ‘you want him, too, Sultan? Ah! my poor Sultan, which of us wants him most?’

She bent down to hide her face on the black curly neck, and when she raised it her eyes were full of tears. She took the great shaggy head in her arms and kissed it. Sultan’s first action was a rough embrace, his second—to bound from the sunk fence before him as a well-known whistle caught his ear. Dora had just time to disperse her tears before Charlie, putting his hands on the edge of the smooth lawn, bounded lightly up the low wall which raised it from the park, and, taking his seat on the turf beside her, began to inquire for the rest of the party.

‘Aunt Eleanor and Emmeline and the children have gone in. Where have you been, Charlie?’

‘I! In the enemy’s country.’

‘Not to the foundry?’

‘That I have, though; and just come out alive!’

He gave her a graphic account of his afternoon. Dora listened with the liveliest interest. All that Charlie did interested her; to have him at

home was the greatest of comforts. He was like a brother and sister in one—so at least she, who had never known a sister, thought, and she felt that if Harry must go, the next best possible thing was that Charlie should stay. They now discussed Tom Barnes's position and prospects to their hearts' content ; and then Charlie stretched himself out upon the mossy turf, his arms folded behind his head, his face upturned to the glowing sky. Evening stillness reigned around, broken only by the distant voices of the grey-haired brothers as they paced the terrace behind them.

Presently a clock chimed through the quiet air, and Charlie sat up with a sudden spring.

‘ Half-past six. We ought to have made a bump by this time ! ’

‘ Made what ? ’ cried Dora, starting. ‘ Oh ! of course—the race night at Oxford. ’

‘ To be sure ; and I'll back our boat to be at the head of the river again. Hurrah for old Jack ! ’ and he flung his straw hat high in the air before sinking back to his comfortable repose. ‘ You don't see a stroke like old Jack every day. Here, you didn't see his last letter, ’ and taking one from his pocket he looked it through and handed it to her. ‘ Jack was pretty happy about it, you see. ’

She read it very willingly. It was by no means the first from the same source she had perused respecting the racing prospects of Oxford in

general, and of Charlie's college in particular. But, however long or however short, not one of these effusions ended without a remonstrance on the folly, stupidity, and general madness of going down home at the beginning of the summer term, and with an entreaty that old Merivale would yet think better of it, and come back to keep wickets for them like a brick! Such a passage ended the letter in her hand, and she turned towards the recumbent Charlie, gazing serenely into the evening sky, with half a wish to enforce their advice. Charlie had never told anybody in so many words that he had come home because the house had grown melancholy, because his father was dull, and his mother sad, weak, and anxious. On the contrary, he said that he wanted to read for his 'Greats,' and could do it best at the Hanger. Dora knew too well to believe him, and could understand much better than father or mother how great a sacrifice it must have been, for she best comprehended how dearly Charlie loved all that was signified by the red and white ribbon round the straw hat at his side, and could form a perfect conception of the vision now passing before his upturned eyes—the Isis side, the racing oars, the hurrying crowd, the wild conflicting shouts, the triumph, and the mad delight. She had seen it all for herself a year ago, when she and her uncle had spent an enchanting week at

Oxford, under the care of the much-honoured and most hospitable Charlie, and relays of his numerous friends. Then had she first fully understood how happy was the life on which Harold had wilfully turned his back. Then she had comprehended the reason for the lively affectionate remembrance her uncle still preserved of his college days, and did not wonder at the keen interest with which he now visited each familiar spot, or greeted as old friends grave dons and dignified Heads of Houses. Among these was Charlie's own 'Head,' and Uncle John had smiled and nodded not a little while listening to the old man's exact, terse, somewhat antique praises of his nephew, assuring him in return, with all the energy of a boy, that, 'on his life, he hadn't a doubt he spoke nothing but the truth.' And while Charlie was thus honoured in high places it was also easy to see how great a favourite he had become in the undergraduate world. Foremost in nearly every athletic and active sport, last in nothing excepting his own estimation of himself, as modest as he was manly, with a perfect temper, the happiest spirits, and every charm of appearance and manner, it was not wonderful that he should be surrounded by a host of friends, and should have tasted college life in its most attractive form. The only possible fault to be found with the charms of such a life is

their shortness, and that, while all pleasant things must die—these must be reckoned among the shortest-lived of all. A very few years see both their beginning and their close and then life has to be begun in some tamer or some harder way. And it was this short time that Charlie was voluntarily abridging for himself, giving up that *crème de la crème*—his last summer term!

‘They seem to be breaking their hearts for want of you,’ said Dora, as she gave back the letter.

‘That’s all nonsense ; Dale can keep wickets just as well as I can, only he never will take it from me.’

‘Still, it does seem almost a pity you should not be there.’

‘It would seem a greater pity if I were plucked by-and-by.’

‘But it is a long time to the autumn, and you could read a little at Oxford, I suppose.’

‘Little it would be in the summer term! How some fellows manage it I can’t think ; I know I never can.’

‘But there is to be your reading party in the summer.’

‘That’s as may be.’ Charlie turned on his elbow to try his straw hat on Sultan.

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean that it depends on circumstances—Hold up, old boy.’

‘You are not thinking of giving it up? You can’t stay at home the whole summer.’

‘You want to get rid of me, I suppose?’

‘We shall want to get rid of you very much in July. We shall find it will be better for us to see nothing of you at all for at least six weeks.’

He laughed—then, sitting up again, looked straight before him.

‘I saw Mr. Lister yesterday,’ he said.

Mr. Lister was the kind elderly doctor, who had known them all from childhood. He was sensible as well as kind, devoted to his favourite patient and sincere friend Lady Merivale, and unwearied in his attempts to make her husband listen to him on the subject of his wife’s health, and to abate, if possible, the lofty tone in which Sir Philip was accustomed to allude to ‘Lady Merivale’s unfortunately nervous condition.’

‘For a private consultation?’ asked Dora. ‘You don’t look in a very anxious state, Charlie.’

‘Not for myself; it was about my mother.’

‘Did you really go and see him in order to talk about Aunt Eleanor.’

‘Yes, I did. She has seemed to me so much weaker since I came back this time, and I wanted to ask him if she was, and if he could tell me what was really the matter with her.’

‘What did he say?’

‘Well, he seemed to say a good deal at the time, but when I thought it over afterwards, it

came to uncommonly little ; he didn't speak out. Why won't doctors speak out, I wonder.'

'Perhaps because they don't always know themselves.'

This was a new view to Charlie's mind. He sat turning it over for a minute or two. 'Then we ought to have someone else,' he said.

'It mightn't be a bad thing. I believe Mr. Lister has thought of it too at times. But he is a very good doctor, and knows more than he says, I dare say.'

'Well, he said uncommonly little, only that she wants a great deal of care, and must never be overtired, or excited, or depressed, if we can help it ; nor over-anxious—and that with Phil at Varna !'

'She is always anxious, every hour of the day and night !'

'I know—and who is to prevent it ? However,' Charlie rose to his feet, 'till I see her better, or till some big-wig comes from London and says there is nothing much the matter with her, I don't intend to go away.'

CHAPTER III.

‘A DINNER-PARTY, I declare,’ said Charlie, as, entering the dining-room on the following day, he paused before a pile of plate just raised by the butler’s hands upon the sideboard.

The rest of the party, who were seated at luncheon, inquired with a laugh whether he had really forgotten it.

‘Of course I had ; I always do till Bennett puts out the great candlesticks to remind me. Mother, you are eating no luncheon at all.’ He shook his head reproachfully over her unused plate, then seated himself beside her and laid a hand on hers. An Eastern mail was due that day, but no letters had arrived, and until they should appear Lady Merivale would be little able to eat or to sleep. Charlie gave one anxious look at her face, paler even than usual, before turning away to address his sister Lina.

Emmeline, or Lina, Darrell had been the second Miss Merivale by birth ; by position the first, during the three years that had followed her eldest sister’s marriage, before her own took

place. Grand and happy years they were in her memory, with all their importance, their pleasures, and their interests. Could her life have come over again, it is to be feared she would have chosen to prolong them rather than enter upon a married life with much fewer worldly advantages than had fallen to the lot of either of her sisters.

Colonel Darrell was a brother officer of Philip with good family, good looks, and a most easy temper to recommend him. It had been entirely a love-match, and Emmeline had been deaf at the time to all the prudent objections of her father. Her romance, however, had not been of the solid nature which can stand such small experience of the trials of real life as had come to her in the course of nine years of married life, and a general sense of having got less than her just deserts gave to her handsome features a peevish, discontented expression. She had the art of investing even a real trial with an air of petty irritation, and those who heard her now might reasonably doubt whether the chief affliction was that her husband should be absent, possibly never to return, or that her own plans for visiting a German watering-place had been upset.

‘ Well, Lina,’ said Charlie, ‘ who is coming—Uncle John and Dora ? ’

‘ Oh, yes ; and the Falconers, and—but you

had better look at the list. Stupid creatures all of them. I am sure I don't know why we have them !'

Charlie might truly have remarked that she only could answer that question, since their father was indifferent and their mother averse to parties at the present time. It was Lina alone who desired them ; not sorry to be once more receiving guests in the state which she felt to be fitting for a former Miss Merivale, as her mother seldom appeared in company. Occasionally, it is true, a doubt did arise in Mrs. Darrell's mind as to what might be said respecting her own appearance at large assemblies while her husband was at a distance, and possibly in danger, but she never failed to decide that everybody ought to think it an excellent thing that she should support her spirits by a little quiet society.

'And which stupid creature,' said Charlie, 'am I to take in—Dora?'

'No, indeed. She would not be much flattered by that arrangement.'

'May she never have a worse fate !' said Lady Merivale, with a fond look at her boy's bright face.

'The list is somewhere,' said Mrs. Darrell, languidly. 'I forgot about Dora and the Falcons when we asked them, but I suppose they meet again now, and Edward is away, so

people will not be surprised at seeing them here together.'

'Especially,' said Charlie, emphatically, 'as no one knows it excepting ourselves.'

'People always guess those things pretty quickly, though in this case, certainly, few would have guessed that she could be so very foolish.'

'I confess,' said Sir Philip, with an air of lofty candour, 'that I was myself considerably surprised at the decision she came to upon the subject. She never received such an offer before, I imagine, and it may be some time before she does so again.'

'I was very sorry for him, poor fellow,' said Lady Merivale, gently; 'but I know she felt that she really could not care for him at all.'

'That, my dear, I imagine to be a young lady's usual formula. The surprising thing is that she should not have found herself able to care for him.'

Edward Falconer, being the eldest son of a neighbouring squire, with a very good estate, and not being himself especially deficient in mind or person, was entitled, in Sir Philip's estimation, to a most favourable hearing from any young lady to whom he might choose to address himself. Such a hearing, however, he had lately failed to obtain from Dora. Lady Merivale, who had already listened to her husband's opinion on

the subject more than once without being able to agree with him, thought it the wisest plan to quit the subject and the room together.

As Charlie opened the door his eyes again dwelt anxiously upon her, and directly she had gone he turned to his father with a proposal that a messenger should be despatched to Compton, the post-town to the Hanger, six miles distant, in case the latest post should have brought down the Eastern letters. He appealed in vain. Sir Philip was convinced that he understood perfectly well the hours of the foreign mails, and that such an arrival was impossible.

Charlie seldom troubled anyone, least of all his father, by opposing their decisions, but to-day he felt inclined to persevere. It would be a chance, he knew, but surely any chance of a better night for his mother was worth attending to.

‘Certainly,’ said Sir Philip, stiffly, ‘and if there were a chance I should make it my business to send, but there is none, as I have already shown your sister.’

He proceeded to show it again, to his own entire conviction, if not to that of his hearers.

‘Things should be better managed, then,’ said Lina, discontentedly. ‘If there were not shameful dawdling somewhere among the post-office people the letters would have arrived by this

time, and now if I were to get a letter from poor Frank this evening, how could I find time to read it?’

‘At all events, mamma would have no such difficulty ; she will be alone, upstairs.’

‘What ?’ said Sir Philip, turning to his daughter, ‘has your mother resolved upon shutting herself up again this evening ?’

‘Oh dear, yes ! I shall have them all on my hands.’

Sir Philip’s brow clouded. ‘Really,’ he said, ‘I must be allowed to doubt the wisdom of such a proceeding ; but remonstrance would be useless, I imagine.’

‘Mr. Lister does not wish her to try,’ said Charlie.

‘Lister ! I often doubt whether he does not do her more harm than good. I will absolutely have some competent man down from London to see her, and try if it is not possible to keep Lister more out of the house !’

‘Perhaps, father, he might be glad if you would do so.’

‘Country practitioners are uncommonly fond of the name of a consultation, I am quite aware of that,’ was the dry reply. ‘You ride with me at three, Charlie ? I want to show you where the draining is to be done on Dodd’s farm. Frances and Barrymore do not arrive till five ; we shall be back before that hour.’

Five o'clock came and found the whole party assembled round the tea-table on the terrace; enlarged now by the addition of the eldest daughter of the house and her husband, who had arrived for the night from London.

Frances Barrymore had, as Frances Merivale, been very early in life a precocious young lady of the world, with much of the family beauty, and all the family pride. Twelve years of matrimony had developed her into a fashionable, cold-mannered, overbearing woman. She resembled her father in many particulars; it was therefore not surprising that Sir Philip entertained a high admiration and respect for his eldest daughter. Ever since her first appearance in the great world he had foreseen that she would be a credit to the family, and when the prudent Frances engaged herself at the age of three and twenty to a well-to-do Irish viscount, fifteen years her senior, he felt that his predictions had been fully verified.

Lord Barrymore was not an interesting man, he farmed and he sported, but he did both in a dull, heavy way, and dinner was fast becoming to him the most exciting event of the day. Frances combated none of her husband's characteristics, she knew what he was when she married him, and did so with the intention—fully carried out—of shortly becoming herself the real ruler at Barrymore Castle. She managed the estates,

ordered the house, arranged the education of all the children, and, having finished her own affairs, had always some superfluous energy left with which to advise and direct other people respecting the way in which they should manage theirs.

‘You are not at Oxford, Charlie,’ she remarked, as they sat round the tea-table.

Charlie agreed to the statement.

‘Ah!’ said his brother-in-law, ‘why not? I see young fellows now who say they are at college, but they never seem to go there. Can’t understand why it is; never could, for the life of me!’

Charlie explained that, having resided the number of terms necessary for taking his degree, all he now had to do was to get leave from the head of his college to read at home until he returned to go into the Schools in the following autumn.

‘Well,’ continued Lady Barrymore, ‘and what happens then?’

‘Why, I pass, or I’m plucked, as the case may be.’

‘Plucked—pray don’t mention such a word! I mean what is to be the next thing after taking your degree?’

‘A jolly long holiday, I sincerely trust;’ and, as if in anticipation of that happy period, Charlie stretched himself along the broad parapet of the terrace balustrade, and pulled off a handful

of the opening tea-roses that were clustering round it.

‘Take a run over to us and have some fishing,’ said Lord Barrymore, ‘know how to kill a salmon—don’t you?’

Charlie nodded, and said he should like it immensely.

‘We shall be delighted to see you,’ said Frances, ‘but afterwards, of course, you will be thinking of your future. It does not answer for a young man to put off beginning life too long.’

‘Got your name down at any clubs—have you?’ suggested her husband. ‘That’s a thing a fellow’s very apt to forget—and it don’t do to put off, as Frances says. They keep a man hanging about a crack club half-a-dozen years nowadays.’

Charlie said his name was down at one, which was likely to be quite as much as he should need.

‘And why, pray?’ inquired his sister quickly. ‘What are you thinking of becoming when you leave Oxford?’

‘Gloriously idle, as I said before;’ and, turning round, Charlie began pelting the children in the garden below with his roses.

‘Take a holiday by all means, but I am asking you to look forward to the end of it.’

‘How can you do such a barbarous thing? Here, Hughie, catch that.’ The next moment

he had jumped down from his hard couch, and was chasing the children among the flower-beds.

A cloud descended on Lady Barrymore's face, and, wholly disregarding her husband's remark that 'a fellow didn't always want to book himself for a twelvemonth beforehand,' she rose, and taking Mrs. Darrell's arm walked with her to a seat at the further end of the terrace, there to begin anew—

'Pray, Lina, what may Charlie's real intentions be?'

'Really I don't know. I never thought of asking.'

'People are different, certainly,' said Lady Barrymore, with a very perceptible shade of contempt in her tone. 'For myself, I could never rest satisfied to live in such uncertainty. I know perfectly well what all my own boys are going to do in life, down to little Algernon in the nursery.'

'Then,' returned Mrs. Darrell with a sigh, 'all I can say is you are uncommonly fortunate. Many other people would be thankful to know as much!'

'People are supine. Does Charlie absolutely never speak of the future?'

'I don't know. He is to take Orders, isn't he? I always thought he was; and to have Hurst some day—it seems the natural thing.'

‘That it might have seemed the natural thing once by no means proves it to be so now.’

‘How? I don’t see.’

‘My dear Lina! I should have thought a child might have seen it.’

‘A child might—but I don’t,’ returned Mrs. Darrell, not unapt to take refuge in sullenness.

‘Why, if I absolutely must explain, look at present circumstances for yourself. If Phil were married, if there were an heir in the next generation, things would be different, but there is none; and now that, contrary to all custom, the Guards have been ordered out, he can but take his chance like anyone else, and until—at any rate—he is safely back in England, Charlie should not dream of taking Orders. They hamper a man of property most terribly.’

‘So you mean to say,’ answered Lina, whose slower mind had been straining after her sister’s rapid flow of ideas, ‘that you expect poor Phil will be killed, and Charlie be the eldest son, and——’

‘Don’t say I *expect* it,’ interrupted her sister. ‘I only say it is a very sad possibility, for which, at any rate, we ought to prepare ourselves.’

‘Really, Frances, it is a dreadful thing to say or to think about, and, considering my unhappy situation, with my poor dear unfortunate Frank in exactly the same position, I do think ——’

A sob and a pocket-handkerchief checked all further utterance.

Lady Barrymore tapped her foot impatiently on the ground.

‘ Really, Lina, if you cannot bear to have even this said, why—I am sorry for you ! I will talk to my father ; *he* is likely to see it in a proper light, at all events.’

‘ Talk to Dora ! ’ ejaculated Mrs. Darrell from behind her handkerchief. ‘ She is more likely to tell you than anyone.’

Words with a secret retaliation in them ! It was not unknown to Lina that Dora’s close intimacy at the Hanger—which had grown up since her eldest sister had quitted it twelve years before—was viewed with little favour by Lady Barrymore.

‘ Dora Vaughan ! And, pray, why am I to apply to her ? ’

‘ Because Charlie is more likely to have told her than anyone ! ’

‘ He might easily have chosen a better confidante. I shall certainly say not one syllable upon the subject to Dora Vaughan ! ’ And, rising indignantly, she walked away more convinced than ever that Dora was much oftener at the Hanger than there could be any reasonable occasion for. It was a conviction deserving no respect, not having for its excuse even so plausible a one as the jealousy of affection, and

springing wholly from the family pride, which could not bear the idea that any outside person should in the smallest degree take up the position of a daughter in the house, even when it had been left perfectly vacant.

Dora and her uncle arrived that evening, according to custom, some time before the general company. She repaired, of course, to the Oak room; and as she was kneeling by Lady Merivale's sofa, assisting to arrange her work, the door opened, and Charlie looked in with a happy face, then advanced into the room, one hand behind his back.

‘What have I got, mamma? Guess.’

She started up with changing colour. ‘Charlie! not—not a letter? tell me!’

‘Yes, indeed, mother dear,’ and he put it into her hand. ‘Phil’s letter all right, you see.’

Lady Merivale leant back with closed eyes, her hands trembling violently.

‘Open it—read it,’ she said faintly. ‘Quick.’

Charlie obeyed—and never did a more ordinary epistle gladden a mother’s longing eyes. Phil was already getting tired of Varna, that was the prevailing fact, and he could send no news, as they always looked themselves to getting it from England. Then came a little grumbling at the Government, and the information that, though well himself, many of the men were getting seedy from the climate, ‘only, thank goodness, not

half so bad as those French beggars,' and the letter ended with, 'How are you getting along yourself, mother dear? Hope my father and the rest are flourishing. I can't imagine what makes Charlie stay down from Oxford; tell him, from me, he is a muff. Darrell is all right—haven't fallen in with Vaughan lately.'

This was all, but Lady Merivale could desire nothing more. After the first fervent 'Thank God, he is well,' followed the pathetic comment, 'Dearest Phil! thinking of us all out there!' and finally she stretched out her hand for the scrawled sheet, which would be comfort and refreshment for a whole week to come.

The moment she did so, Dora, who had been waiting in breathless expectation, held out her own hand.

'Mine, Charlie? Where is it?

'Not here, I am very sorry to say. I spoke to Simpson to know if he could hear of anyone going into Compton, as my father did not wish to send, and he found there was a cart going from the mill. They brought back yours too, but by mistake it has been taken on to Hurst.'

'Ah!—thank you. I must wait.'

She turned away with a sigh and a small tear—a small one, but not quite invisible to Charlie's quick eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

I will not wish thy better state
Was one of low degree,
But I must weep that partial fate
Made such a churl of me.—T. HOOD.

A CONSIDERABLE number of guests assembled that evening at the Hanger, in rooms whose carved walls and windows, wide deep fireplaces, and curiously embossed ceilings, made them at all times a pleasure to contemplate. There were no signs of decay or gloom about the beautiful old house, which, having been always constantly and thoroughly inhabited, presented a happy union of home-like comfort and picturesque antiquity. Each wave of life as it swept through the Hanger had indeed been partially obliterated to make way for its successor, yet each had left sufficient token of its presence to bear witness to the existence and habits of those who for centuries past had lived and died within its walls. Few could find themselves received within its doors without a secret feeling that there was something in being a Merivale, that it was worth something, in a world of change and decay, to be able to

look back to an unbroken chain of ancestors who had inhabited your home before you for five successive centuries. And though at the present time the Hanger had become an exclusive house, and few guests could feel themselves entirely at ease there, excepting such as came in corresponding state and dignity, there was yet a traditional hospitality belonging to its character, and even they who blamed the Merivale pride could not deny that the Merivale name had always stood high among those of the ancient county families for respectability and honour. Not a few of its members had represented either the county or the neighbouring borough of Arnborough in Parliament, while the picture-gallery which ran along the whole length of one side of the house testified to the manner in which younger sons of past generations had served their country, as admirals or generals more or less known to fame. They were at any rate well known to Sir Philip, who felt a more cordial regard for his great-great-grandfathers and uncles than for most of his living acquaintance. It was the same in everything. His children might introduce modern fashions within their home if they pleased, but nothing would have induced Sir Philip himself to appear at the head of his dining-table in any other chair than the stiff carved oaken seat in which, because his father and grandfather had sat there before

him, he always felt most entirely at his ease, most truly a Merivale.

Dignified grandeur, however, is not the best friend to easy conversation, and this evening, as on most others, it was evident that the talk and the laughter increased in rapid ratio towards the head of the table, where Lina Darrell in lace and pearls was a less awful object to contemplate than the great Sir Philip, and where the Vicar of Hurst's cheerful voice might be heard diffusing a comfortable friendliness all around him. A genial nature and the calling he had chosen had alike combined to check any family characteristics in good Uncle John; everybody knew that, Merivale though he was, his house, his hand, and his heart were closed against no one. All who sought Hurst Grange felt sure of a ready welcome from its young mistress and its older master, and the universal popularity both enjoyed had followed as a matter of course.

That evening, when the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room, Dora felt it her duty to attend to a certain Miss Harris who was in the neighbourhood merely as a visitor, experience having shown her that strange ladies, if not very attractive or important, were apt to be left out in the cold at the Hanger. Miss Harris, however, possessed a fluent tongue, and, from the way she used it, appeared to have no intention of being left out of anything. Having met one member of the

Hanger family two or three times in London she presently turned the conversation upon ‘that charming, original Lady Campbell.’ Dora hoped that her own face expressed no surprise at the epithets.

‘You do not wonder at my calling her so—do you? I delight in originality myself—a little frankness is so refreshing, in town especially. And those charming children—little pets’—once or twice Miss Harris had beheld them at a distance, driving in the park—‘*how* are they?’

‘Very well indeed, thank you, when we heard last.’

‘And poor dear Sir Malcolm—I do trust he is going to regain his health?’

‘We hope he is. The winter at Nice seems to have done him great good.’

‘How rejoiced I am to hear it! And now will they soon be returning to Grosvenor Square?’

‘Oh no, not yet! They are to spend the summer in Switzerland, and next winter at Nice again. They always intended to be away for two years.’

‘Ah! indeed. And then having to give up his seat in Parliament—such a trial to a man! I dare say he prefers the Continent for a time.’

‘Yes, it was a great trial. He had had it so long.’

‘Of course, and then you know many so much

wished his brother, Mr. Campbell Sinclare—by the way, I believe he has dropped the “Sinclare” again now, has he not?—could have come forward in his place.’

‘Indeed!’

‘Oh dear yes! I heard it most warmly discussed at a great Conservative house in town, but at that very moment poor Mrs. Campbell Sinclare died—so unfortunate, you know—and there was someone else ready to come forward, and so it came to nothing. Such a pity—such ill-luck for the good cause—you are all Conservatives here, of course?—to lose so highly talented a man, and such a speaker! You have met him, no doubt?’

‘Yes—formerly.’

‘And don’t you think him delightful?’

There was a moment’s pause before the answer came.

‘It was long ago. I was hardly grown up.’

‘Ah! then naturally you might not remark. But he is the most agreeable man one meets anywhere, I assure you—wonderful!’—once, and once only, had Miss Harris been within earshot of him, on which occasion she had heard him utter about twenty words—‘and if there had only been a little more time I dare say he would have stood, for people remarked as it was how soon he was going about again after her death.’

‘People often say that sort of thing, I think.’

‘Very true! But I saw him—at least a friend of mine saw him—at a large party not three months after her death—three *or* four. That did not look like deep feeling, did it?’

‘I do not know. We heard that he was very unhappy.’

‘Ah! at the time, no doubt; but then men have not our strong retentive feelings, have they?’

Dora’s strongest present feeling, and one that she certainly expected to retain for some time, was that she had had more than enough of Miss Harris’s company, and she looked anxiously for the arrival of the gentlemen in hopes of a release. In they came—six—seven—eight—but the ninth was wanting, and he the most likely of all to come to her assistance. Presently a footman, bending over a tea-tray, brought a request that she would herself join Mr. Charles in the hall. There on the edge of the billiard-table sat Mr. Charles, a smile on his face, in his hand—Harold’s letter.

Dora flew to it like a famished creature.

‘O Charlie, Charlie! How did you get it?’

‘I ran out before dinner and got them to send over from the stables. I knew you would be wretched all night without it.’

‘You dear good Charlie! I must read it this moment if there were twenty thousand dinner parties!’

‘Of course! Come in here.’

He opened the library door. A shaded lamp was burning on the table, making an island of light in the long dim room. There Dora gave herself up to the joy of her letter, first gazing with delight at the well-known direction, at the seal, at anything—everything, which Harold’s fingers had touched. Then came the letter itself—a very different affair from Phil’s. Here was no grumbling, only eagerness to be at work somewhere, while inconveniences seemed merely to furnish matter for a joke; and Dora laughed and called Charlie to listen as she read the humorous pithy phrases in which Harry was wont to describe things in general. But best of all were a few words at the close, such as Harold’s reserve would hardly have let him utter had he not been in the face of danger, thousands of miles away. Their rareness seemed to double their value, and she was reading them over and over again, when the door opened, and Bennet, the butler, looked in.

‘A young man asking for you, sir.’

‘What young man?’

‘Barnes, sir, he says his name is. I have told him several times you are not at liberty, but he refuses to go; he has been here half-an-hour.

‘Tom Barnes! what can he want? Ask him—no—show him in here.’

In another minute Tom Barnes entered, his

hair and dress as disordered as usual, his face pale and haggard.

Dora had retired to the end of the room, and was folding up her letter, while Charlie, greeting Tom with some surprise, inquired if anything were the matter.

‘It’s starving and dying, if you think that matters,’ was the answer in Tom’s very surliest tone.

‘What is?—who is?’

‘Old Lyddy.’

‘What! your grandfather’s servant? Sit down and tell me.’

‘I went there,’ said Tom, dropping into a chair, and staring straight before him, ‘on my way back this afternoon, and found her all alone, in a sort of faint; and when I’d brought her round a bit, she could do nothing but groan and shake her head; so I went for the doctor, and he says she’s starved; and I went for the Vicar, and they said he was here; and I came here—and they said the house was full of company, and I couldn’t speak to anyone!’

‘And you have been waiting about? I am sorry; how tired you must be!’

Tom was both tired and exhausted. Since his frugal bread and cheese in the middle of the day he had tasted nothing, and was much disheartened by his fruitless attempts to get food and help for the poor old woman. How urgent

the case was might be imagined from the fact that he was ready at last to present himself as a beggar. Never in the midst of his own privations had he felt such bitter indignation against his grandfather as on hearing the doctor's verdict that afternoon—that old Lydia's complaint was exhaustion and weakness, consequent upon a long course of insufficient nourishment. To people in general she had always seemed a crabbed old woman, but the one soft place in her heart had been kept for Tom, and he knew that it was for his sake that she still stayed on with the old miser, instead of going to the Union some miles away, where at least she might have been safe from dying of hunger. Tom in a wild fury had burst into the old man's room, where he had once vowed no power on earth should take him again, and overwhelmed him with a torrent of reproaches, violent enough to penetrate partially even his deaf and dulled ears; then searched the house for something that Lydia might be able to swallow, with small success, as the doctor assured him she required very different nourishment from the dry crusts which were all that the cupboard afforded. Tom, grown desperate, set off for the Grange, where his ill-fortune has been related. Another two-mile walk was before him, and at the end of it he found himself obliged to stand about among hurrying servants, or to lean faint and weary against a passage wall, while delicate dishes were

borne past him, on which he felt a wild desire to rush and carry them off to the poor old woman who lay absolutely starving for want of good food. The first unselfish impulse which had impelled him to seek help under all difficulties was giving way to less amiable feelings. The signs of luxury all around, joined to the utter inattention shown to himself, were rousing a fierce jealous pride in his breast. What business had these people to be feasting on dainties when a poor old creature could not get a mouthful she could swallow? How were they any better than robbers and murderers? Lydia would die of want, when the bones that their dogs ate might have kept her alive. Things were all wrong. Why were some so rich and some so poor? Why should he be begging of them any more than they of him?

By the time that he was bidden to follow the butler through the noiseless swing-doors into the large and lighted hall, Tom's mind had become full of bitterness towards everything and everyone around him. Charlie's voice was for once incapable of dispelling the cloud; even when he went on to express his great concern and desire of offering assistance, it was of no avail. Tom sat black and scowling, fresh anger rising in his soul as he looked at the evening dress, so exact and trim, at the studs, the ring, the flower in the coat, all serving, as it seemed, to widen the difference between them. Silently and sullenly he

denounced his hero as an empty coxcomb, fit company only for purse-proud heartless swells, who could feel for no one. What was the use of Charlie searching his waistcoat pocket for money which was not there? Could Lydia eat money? or did he mean him to walk three miles more to Arnborough to buy her food, when he was ready to drop with fatigue?

‘Has this poor woman all the things she wants for to-night, Tom?’

It was another voice that asked it, and Tom raised his eyes to the speaker with a start of surprise. He had not seen her on entering, and now that she came forward from the twilight of the room into the soft light of the shaded lamp, a marvellous apparition revealed itself to his eyes. The gossamer dress, which looked as if fairies had woven it out of rose-leaves, the flowers clustering in the shining hair, the delicate lace, the gleaming jewel at her neck—here were things he had never seen before! Here was a fine display of show, luxury, and expense for an indignant young democrat to denounce! But where was Tom’s righteous anger now? He met the kind glance of those beautiful eyes, he heard the tones of that sweet low voice, and his wrath began to melt away. He saw that the lovely face looked still lovelier in the midst of its adornments—an evident proof that this, according to the order of nature, was exactly the way in

which she ought to appear! He could no more be angry with her than he could be angry with a flower for blooming, and suddenly across his black and jealous repinings flashed a softer feeling, a despairing regret that a world of lovely sights should exist, to be closed for ever against himself!

She had to repeat her question before he answered gloomily, 'The bed she lies on, a dry crust, and an old bone—that's all.'

'What!' cried the others in horror, 'that all?'

'Yes; all,' repeated Tom, jerking out his words in the most matter-of-fact manner. 'What more should there be? Never is more up there—doctor said she was dying of want.'

'How dreadful! But couldn't you——' Charlie stopped.

'Couldn't I—what?' said Tom, turning fiercely round upon him. 'Couldn't *I* get her meat, and wine, and tea, and jelly, and broth, and all the things she ought to have and hasn't, and a good nurse to look after her, and take her out of that hole that isn't fit for a dog? No, I couldn't! though there are lots that could—that are rolling in money and food, and never come near a poor miserable starving creature; and if you don't believe me, you can look at all I've got in the world to keep myself; and I'm as tired as a dog, and as hungry!' He dashed a

very thin-looking old purse on the table, and glared across it at Charlie, who, after a moment's silence, turned round to Dora, uttered a few low words, and left the room.

She advanced to the table, took up a pencil and paper, and began to write diligently; then, folding and directing her note, she gave it to Tom.

‘This is for Mrs. Sage, at the Grange,’ she said; ‘it will not be much out of your way, will it, to call there as you go back? It will be easier to send anything from there than from this house to-night. I have put down the things I thought would be of most use at once, and to-morrow we will be sure to come up and see her. Now I will write a line to a woman in the village who, I feel sure, will go back with you and stay with poor Lydia to-night.’

As she finished the second note and put it towards him Tom's face had altered.

‘I say,’ he said hoarsely, ‘if you're doing this to make me ashamed of myself you needn't go on. I was a brute.’

‘No; you were only vexed.’

‘I was—I was regularly angered, standing out there by the kitchen, to see a cartload of things going in and out, and she dying for want of a morsel.’

‘And no wonder! But, you see, we none of us knew how bad it was in your grandfather's house.’

‘No, to be sure. It’s his doing, no one else’s; it’s he that’s been killing her by inches all these years past, and the worst of it is there’s no law to punish him!’

‘You can hardly wish him a greater punishment than the miserable life he must lead, poor man.’

‘Miserable!’ Tom gave a scornful laugh. ‘Not he! he’s got the only thing he cares for on earth to sit and gloat over. Money’s food and drink and life to him—he cares for nothing if you leave him that. It’s those that have got feelings that can be miserable, not those that haven’t.’

Something in the last few words struck his hearer greatly. No one who looked at the thin pale face, with the gleaming eyes and flexible lips, could doubt that its owner had feelings, nor that they were such as very often made him miserable. What was poor Tom himself but a forlorn homeless creature, a mere waif and stray upon the world’s waves? Dora looked at him with sincerest compassion.

‘And he is the only relation you have in the world,’ she said. ‘That is very sad.’

The kind tones nearly worked a miracle; they almost brought tears into Tom’s eyes. He had to swallow down a lump in his throat before he answered gruffly, ‘’Tisn’t very jolly. There’s not much love lost between him and me.’

‘Love—no! All you can do is to forgive him.’

Tom shook his head. ‘If it was only me, maybe I might—at least, I might forget some day, if that would do as well. But I can never forget nor forgive his wickedness in leaving a faithful old body to starve that has served him these twenty years and more—never!’

‘But, Tom—we all need forgiveness.’

‘Ah!’ Tom darted a quick look upon her. ‘You mean I oughtn’t to have said what I did, by now, to—*him*. I know that, and I don’t expect he’ll forgive me nor see me again in a hurry.’

‘Yes, indeed he will! I did not mean that! You will see him this moment.’

She went to the door to admit Charlie, who entered, carrying some of the good things of which his guest certainly stood in need.

‘Eat and drink,’ he said, with a commanding nod, ‘and don’t say another word till you have finished it all.’

‘Good-night,’ said Dora. ‘I will be sure to come to Stone Farm to see Lydia to-morrow.’

She held out her hand, and as Tom felt the touch of the delicate glove upon his own soiled fingers he tried hard to make something that should pass for a bow, while a dark flush mounted to his brow.

Ten minutes afterwards he was on his road

back again, much relieved and refreshed in body and in mind ; yet as he pursued his way across the downs in the soft summer twilight he sighed deeply—not once, but many a time. Poor Tom !

CHAPTER V.

THE married life of Sir Malcolm and Lady Campbell had been for the first five or six years a prosperous and happy one, but a serious anxiety had lately arisen to trouble their minds. Sir Malcolm's health had become so uncertain that not only London and the House of Commons but England and the Highlands had to be altogether given up. Two winters in a warm climate were declared to be absolutely necessary; Glenarchie and the London house were therefore to be let for a couple of years, and the Campbell family had quitted England for a foreign home. Immediately before their departure another trouble had befallen the family, that event, namely, to which Miss Harris had referred—the death of Mrs. Campbell Sinclair. A delicacy of constitution, which declared itself soon after her marriage to Angus Campbell, had quickly clouded over all those bright prospects which had attended their union, and for three years before her death she had become a settled invalid, seldom able to leave her sofa. Clare had borne her trials with brave cheerfulness. The deep attachment to

her husband with which their married life had begun never knew the least diminution; every half-hour which the claims of his profession allowed him to spend at her side she reckoned as a priceless treasure, and would not have changed her position as his wife, though on a sick and suffering couch, for any other that the world could have offered her. When the end came at last, Sir Malcolm, more occupied with the thought of his brother's loss than of his own health, was anxious to delay the departure, and refused altogether to start until he had secured a promise from Angus that he would now, as far as possible, look upon their home as his, and would come to them abroad as often as his busy life would permit. His success at the bar had been great, and now that he was left a childless widower there was nothing to prevent his time from being entirely devoted to his profession.

The departure of the Campbells for the Continent had been greatly felt at the Hanger, where their visits had hitherto been long and frequent. Dora grieved for the loss of Effie, who had often come to her at Hurst, and Lady Merivale for the absence, not only of a daughter, but of the three little grandchildren, to whom the Hanger, during their parents' residence in London, had been almost a country home. Lina and her two children were still to be had, but Lina's own presence was not always enlivening, and Lady

Barrymore seldom allowed any of her family to cross the Irish Channel, children, as she said, being always most out of the way at home. She came herself with her husband to spend a couple of months in London every season, and generally paid several flying visits to the Hanger in the course of them. Short though they were, she seldom left the house without pointing out to her mother some weak point in the domestic arrangements which it would be desirable to amend with as little delay as possible. On the present occasion, however, the question to be discussed was of so important a nature, that Sir Philip himself must be appealed to. She therefore repaired to him in the library after breakfast, and at once opened her case. Little as Sir Philip believed himself to stand in need of advice from anyone, Frances knew of old that her well-chosen speeches were always listened to with attention. An eldest daughter, whose own career had been marked with success, prudence, and admirable judgment, had a natural right to make herself heard.

She urged that present circumstances might make a change in Charlie's destination desirable.

Sir Philip had had some such idea himself.

She observed that it would be well to put before him the advantages of other professions—for instance, of the bar.

Sir Philip was by no means unwilling to entertain the proposal. At the present time, however, truth compelled him to add that he believed Charlie's preference to be decidedly for a country life.

'At present; of course—no doubt. Every boy likes cricket and hunting, but let him at least try London. Let him have some idea of what the best society is before he throws it away in a hurry.'

Sir Philip suggested that he had known it at Oxford.

'Oxford! true. But Oxford is not London. He should see more than Oxford men. He should mix in the London world. No education can be complete without this. With his name and his great personal advantages Charlie should not be allowed at three or four and twenty to bury himself for life in a country parish.'

Sir Philip moved his head in doubtful acquiescence.

'There is truth in what you say; no doubt,' he admitted, 'a knowledge of the world is always an advantage. Still I will not deny that it has been a satisfaction to my mind to look upon my youngest son as the future Vicar of Hurst. It is a very proper position for a younger son of the family, and one that in my opinion he is likely to fill worthily.'

'For a younger son, perhaps, but'—she

hesitated slightly—‘much as we all wish to look on him as the younger son only, we cannot forget that life is uncertain.’

‘I understand you, my dear Frances. If Phil had married—a circumstance I have long desired in vain—things might be different.’

‘Just so,’ said Lady Barrymore decidedly; ‘but as they are, even if he had not been called out to a post of danger, I should say that for Charlie to take Orders would be a most undesirable step.’

Sir Philip shook his head. ‘There is much truth in what you say,’ he answered.

‘Then, father, may I ask what steps you propose taking to prevent it?’

Her father paused. ‘My next step? I shall probably mention it to John.’

Happy expression!—from how many wounds had it not saved Sir Philip’s self-love! Not ‘I want a clearer head and more sensible judgment than my own, and cannot really form any opinion until I have his to guide me.’ Nothing of the kind! Merely the natural brotherly remark, ‘I shall mention it to John.’

Lady Barrymore understood it all better than her father himself, and knew that it would at present be vain to press for more. Sir Philip’s mind must work in its accustomed grooves, or it could not move at all. She had made an impression, and this was all that could be hoped for at

first; but she much regretted her own necessary departure that day, since her uncle, as a clergyman, would of course urge merely his own narrow professional view of the question.

She need not have been afraid. The Vicar listened in total silence to the communication made to him by Sir Philip, when next they met. The latter had even to press for an answer before one was forthcoming.

‘So! You want my opinion on the matter. Charlie is—how old?’

‘Twenty-two next August.’

‘And no man can take Orders till he is twenty-three; very few would take them then if they came to me for advice. Where is the hurry?’

‘Only this—if he is to become a barrister his name must be entered. Matters must be duly considered when it is the question of a profession for life.’

‘They must; and as Charlie, to the best of my belief, has always meant to be a clergyman, he will not alter his mind without a great deal of consideration, which he ought not to be asked to give now. He has his “Greats” to think of, and that is enough for any man, in all conscience! Wait till they are over, and speak to him then. He will have his own opinion about it, you may be sure, and that is of more consequence than mine.’

The few words of a full heart carry weight. Sir Philip became satisfied that his own first step in the matter should be to do nothing.

But Lady Barrymore's designs, though they failed to reach Charlie's ears, were not without an immediate effect.

Mr. Merivale walked back to his home that afternoon with a slower step than usual, and when he reached the point of the downs where Hurst appeared below him, paused and looked down at the well-known scene with unwonted sadness in his face. The dark roofs of his home showing amidst bright spring foliage, the thatched cottage gable ends below, with curling wreaths of blue smoke rising among a sea of snowy orchards, the church spire, the stream, the downs, the distant hills, all were familiar, all were dear to the eyes that gazed upon them. This had been his home; here he had known not only the sorrows and joys of his own life, but those of all the dwellers in the humble homes beneath him. They had been his people in the truest sense. He had loved them well; he loved the place where he had dwelt among them from youth to age, and had loved not a little to think how another of his name and race would take up the tale when it was ended for himself, and the old life would go on unbroken. 'And through the best of them,' Uncle John would often declare emphatically to himself—'there never was a

better among us than Charlie.' And now Frances wanted to rob Hurst of its promised good, and Frances was clever, determined and hard to oppose. She had set her heart upon Charlie's being a man of the world and not a country parson, and she was by far apt to get her own way.

Dora, however, was firm in unbelief when she learnt Lady Barrymore's desires from her uncle.

'Charlie has always meant to come and be your curate, from a little boy,' she said. 'It has been a settled thing.'

'So I have thought—and often have I fancied what it would be to have him at my side when I was old and beginning to wear out, as I am now!'

'Uncle John, how can you say so! You are as young as ever.'

'Ah! my dear, I am no better than an old coach-horse, who can just go his old jog-trot along his own old stage, where he knows every foot of the way; but put him to anything new, and down he goes! And there are ever so many new notions coming in now, and he would have to be up to them all. Ah! dear me.'

Dora came up to her uncle's side and stroked his hand. 'Don't be afraid, dear Uncle John; nothing Frances can say will change him, I am sure.'

He sighed. 'You little know what a woman

with a will like that can do! She can talk till black seems white, and crooked ways straight, and can turn his very conscience against itself! Her own way she will get by hook or by crook—always did—always! “Overbearable,” that’s what Peggy, the old housemaid, used to call her—you don’t remember Peggy—“that overbearable Miss Frances.” No!—you don’t quite know Frances.’

‘But we quite know Charlie—both of us—so let us trust him, whatever Frances says!’

Dora had her own personal reasons for an ardent desire that this trust might not prove to be misplaced. Two attempts at curates had been made already, but in both instances had turned out failures, of which she herself had been the involuntary cause, Hurst Grange having proved too attractive for the happiness of either gentleman. When the second had retired from the scene, Uncle John had vowed he would have no more of this, and had fallen back upon his old plan of working the parish single-handed, and obtaining Sunday assistance from Arnborough. Though this might go on for a time—since in the opinion of others as well as herself her uncle’s powers were as bright as ever—still a period must come when less work would be desirable for him, and all her hopes had been fixed upon the happy time when Charlie would become his helper.

Meanwhile she did everything that lay in her own power to help him in his parish work. Tom's appeal for old Lydia had been unconsciously made to ears always ready to hear, and hands equally quick to work. She went up to Stone Farm at once and visited the poor old woman regularly during the few weeks of life that remained to her. Lydia had seemed to the world in general an unattractive old woman, but Dora found she had always kept a soft place in her heart for 'the lad Tom,' and it was touching to hear how Tom in return had tried to provide her with little comforts out of his own scanty earnings.

Sometimes, when she quitted the wretched house, she would find Tom waiting outside to exchange some words on Lydia's condition, and though they were short and few on his side, Dora could detect under the rough outside a true attachment to his old friend, which made her forgive all want of manner and look at the speaker with respect. He would frequently come down to Hurst in the evenings now to fetch things that were needed by Lydia, and the Vicar, who had long since forgiven him his outbreak of temper, would detain him for an hour's talk, and prophesy afterwards a bright career for him, when his present way of life could be exchanged for a different one. This was an event that might happen at any time, since, miser though

he was, the old man would not be able to carry his hoards away with him, and he was growing visibly more broken and decrepit with each succeeding winter. Tom, on his side, had softened again; he showed real gratitude for all that was done for Lydia; his manners appeared to improve daily, and he himself to be ready to listen to all friendly counsels. Even his appearance seemed to alter for the better in these few weeks, and when poor old Lydia's end at last came, Tom, in the mourning suit which he had managed to procure, looked so like a gentleman in Hurst church, that it seemed as though the Vicar's predictions were already beginning to be verified. In an interview which he had with him immediately afterwards, he expressed a wish that a stone should be placed over the grave, an expense which Mr. Merivale at once offered to take upon himself, and though Tom entirely refused this, it was in a manly rather than a surly tone, and he thankfully accepted a loan for the purpose—one that the lender felt would certainly be repaid in time, whether by poor Tom, the foundry clerk, or by rich Mr. Barnes, the master of many thousands.

But who can foretell the future, especially the future of a passionate spirit?

About a month after Lydia's funeral, a rumour arose in the village that Tom Barnes was missing, and when the Vicar went forth to inquire, he

found that the tale was true. There had been a fight at the foundry the day before between Tom and Grover himself. The latter, on being worsted, had declared Tom to be the aggressor, and threatened to give him into custody. Tom had escaped to his lodgings—got together his few possessions—left money for his rent on the table—vanished in the night—and been seen no more.

Such was the story, but though he had left no message and no clue, a strong confidence was felt at Hurst Grange that any morning's post might bring some news of the runaway, nor could the Vicar give up expecting them even when the days had grown to weeks and the weeks to months, without bringing any tidings of the lost Tom.

CHAPTER VI.

In peace there's nothing so becomes a man
As modest stillness and humility ;
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger :
 On, on, you noblest English,
Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof !

KING HENRY V.

ONE member of the Campbell household had not accompanied the rest of the party abroad. Miss Goode was too English and too elderly to be able to face the prospect of Continental wanderings. She had settled down instead in a London lodging, to act as a good aunt to a large family of nephews and nieces, and pay long visits to Hurst Grange, where she was in as great request as ever.

Autumnal tints were beginning to touch the woods with gold as she looked forth on them from the train that was conveying her to the Arnborough station on one of the first days of October. Never had she more desired to find herself again at Hurst, though well knowing that it was impossible to tell into what a scene this visit might be taking her. For the

battle of the Alma had been fought and won ; once more the news, unheard for a generation, of English arms victorious in Europe, had made the nation's heart beat high ; and while—in the first moment of exultation—it seemed even not improbable that the advance of the allied troops might have been made, Sebastopol taken, and the whole war concluded by one brilliant stroke, private fears were almost overlooked in the general burst of exultation. No sad details had yet arrived to mar the joyful news. Who had fallen, who had been engaged even, was yet unknown ; and hope was still open to every heart that its beloved ones were both triumphant and safe.

But three days and nights had passed since then—three anxious, endless days—three restless, feverish nights. Such they had been to Dora, and three more at least must pass before any certain news could arrive. The woman's part of warfare had fallen upon her now for the first time. She learnt how much unseen as well as visible anguish belongs to every battle-field, and drank herself of the cup of suffering such fields must bring to thousands on thousands who never draw the sword nor wear the victor's wreath.

She was waiting for her friend at the station with a pale set face and heavy dark-ringed eyes. The sight of her struck Miss Goode to the heart ;

but she would not speak of anxiety nor inquire for the welfare of all until Arnborough was left behind and the carriage had begun to ascend the hill towards Hurst. The accounts of Lady Merivale were the best that could be hoped for. She was remaining calm, and endeavouring to be cheerful. The same could not be said of her daughter Emmeline, who could not or would not exercise any control over her own fears. Dora described her as wandering through the house like a restless spirit, unable to give the least support to others, and seriously adding to Lady Merivale's distress by frequent bursts of lamentations and tears. The only fact which could be dwelt upon with comfort was that Charlie was still at home.

‘What we should do without him,’ she said sighing, ‘I cannot think; he is the only one who is of any real good now.’

‘That,’ said Miss Goode tenderly, ‘I cannot believe.’

‘It is true. I go to Aunt Eleanor, and we try to be cheerful, but all the time we know what a poor pretence it is. But Charlie does not pretend — he really hopes, and believes, and says that all will be well. He is everything to his mother; he spares all the time he possibly can from his reading to be with her.’

‘Is his examination very near now?’

‘Next month, I think. I forget exactly. I

can remember nothing now—but one thing,’ and her voice sank. ‘Goody, we *must* hear, they say, in three or four days’ time.’

‘By letters, yes.’

‘By telegraph from London. Sir Philip has written to Mr. Campbell and begged him to find out the moment the despatches come, and to telegraph if—when—when he knows that all is well.’

‘Have you seen Mr. Campbell since he lost his wife?’ asked Miss Goode, grieved in her inmost soul by the anguish of Dora’s tones, and longing to find a subject that might distract her thoughts, if only for a moment.

‘I have never seen him since he married. He is in constant practice they say—very busy always—but Sir Philip thought he might ask him to telegraph.’ Again she paused, shuddering. What was Mr. Campbell to her now? Only the person who was to let them hear if—— Ah! that awful ‘if.’ Her mind turned away from its contemplation in sickening horror.

It was indeed a strange arrival. Every face about Hurst Grange had the same look of fearful expectation written upon it; the first excitement had passed away, and the thought of what might be coming, of some dreaded intelligence even now speeding its homeward course from the far East, was making all hearts tremble and every voice sink low. The old servants sought

Miss Goode's sympathetic ear to pour out fears they dared not utter before their master or their young lady ; the Vicar himself sat silent, or broke off in faltering accents when he tried to speak cheerfully of Harold—of Phil—of good news to come. Over Hurst and Hanger—as over many and many an English home—had descended a sudden stillness, a lull, a pause in the daily round of life's interests, the same awful breathless hush which falls on the watchers outside the closed door of some sick-room within which is being pronounced a final sentence—for life or for death. There is nothing to be attempted, nothing that can be done by them to avert the decision which they can neither change nor delay ; all Nature's powers are absorbed in one single act—the act of waiting.

At the Hanger there was one additional trouble which might have been spared to its inmates. Miss Goode found that Dora had truly described Mrs. Darrell's restless, agitated state, though she had drawn a softening veil over the manner in which Emmeline harassed and distressed everyone around her by complaints that were worse than useless, and repeated questions which no one could possibly answer. It was an unspeakable relief to escape from her murmurings and repinings in the drawing-room to the atmosphere of the Oak room upstairs. The mother was all that the daughter was not—steadfast,

calm, and trustful ; spreading around her a sense of peace, even in the midst of ceaseless anxiety. Able to put away personal troubles, however pressing they might be, she could welcome an old friend such as Miss Goode truly was with unselfish affection and warm inquiries into all her own interests and cares.

One subject there was lying equally near to the hearts of both, to which they naturally turned with peculiar feeling at the present time. That Dora's position was in some respects a lonely one had long been felt by her elder friends. Most of those whom she loved the best belonged to a different generation to her own, and what her lot might be were they taken from her had often been anxiously discussed in the Oak room by those who might be described as her two foster-mothers. When such conversations had taken place, Miss Goode had not been without some suspicions as to the direction in which Lady Merivale's secret wishes tended, and now for the first time they were openly though timidly declared.

‘ Could I have my own desires for her fulfilled,’ she said, while a faint glow coloured her cheek, ‘ she should be my daughter in name as well as in affection. If I could think she would take my place here some day—perhaps not a very distant day—the greatest wish of my heart would be granted.’

Dora, Phil's wife ! The idea was, Miss Goode felt, too impossible a one to be entertained for a moment by anyone but by Phil's own mother. Happily one side of the question only need be approached. She 'did not imagine that Colonel Merivale had shown any particular inclination at present either towards Dora or towards marriage in general.'

'At present—no—I fear not,' and Lady Merivale sank into a silence soon to be broken by a deep sigh and an irrepressible cry. 'My son—my dear son—we speak of these things, and God only knows where he may be now ! Ah ! if he lives—if we hear that he has been spared to us, I will ask for nothing more.'

That prayer was to be granted. The message, not less dreaded than desired, reached the Hanger within another twenty-fours. Phil was safe. Harold was safe. Colonel Darrell alone had suffered ; he was wounded, not dangerously, but seriously.

The greatness of the relief, the unspeakable thankfulness, the exquisite happiness, too deep for words, which filled the hearts so lately aching with fear, might have been too great a reaction to bear calmly had it not been for the shadow left upon one of the party. All were ready to grieve and to sympathise with Lina's anxiety to the utmost—and certainly the utmost was demanded from all of them. How Mrs

Darrell might have behaved had her husband's wound been declared dangerous must be left to conjecture. From her present despair, her hysterics, her lamentations over herself and her unfortunate children, it might have been supposed she had learnt that they were orphans and she herself a widow.

Why, she demanded, should *she* be the unfortunate one? Why must her poor dear Frank—a husband and a father too!—be the one chosen out to be wounded?

Her uncle talked of resignation, her father of heroism, and every one of hope—all to no purpose. Deaf to every attempt at consolation—which she treated as a want of feeling—indifferent to the distressing agitation she was bringing upon a delicate mother, Emmeline's tears and complaints continued unabated until, to the relief of the whole party, she had sobbed herself to sleep. The morning brought a change in the direction, though not in the force of her feelings. Despair over her husband's wound had given way to a certainty that the real person necessary to his recovery was herself. How could he possibly escape the dangers of young army surgeons and a horrible climate unless his own wife were watching over him? How could anyone be so cruel as to talk of difficulties when a precious life was at stake? Why was she not to fly to Frank? Ladies had talked of going out, she

knew—who could have so much cause as she? Charlie might take her—he should, and he must! Barest humanity could do no less!

Emmeline's understanding was narrow and her obstinacy proverbial. Good sense was, as usual, lost upon her on this occasion; nevertheless Sir Philip was gravely expounding the impracticability of the scheme, when Mr. Lister, descending from a visit to Lady Merivale's room, gave a new turn to affairs by very earnest and serious advice that Mrs. Darrell should by all means be assisted to quit the house immediately, nor did he scruple to say that the farther off she went the better, since the distress and tumult she was creating, in addition to all the unavoidable agitation of the last ten days, were exercising a most injurious effect on her mother, and if this were not at once stopped he could not be answerable for the consequences. Let her go where she would—to Paris—to Marseilles if she pleased—anywhere out of reach of the Hanger! As to her reaching the East itself, Mr. Lister had known her long enough not to think it necessary even to consider such a possibility. He spoke with an authority that could not be resisted; nor did he quit the house until the exact hour for Emmeline's departure had been named.

It was finally settled that she should start that very day for France in company with her Uncle John. Much as Mr. Merivale hated leaving

home, mad and impossible as he thought his niece's present scheme, he had decided without five minutes' hesitation that if she went, so must he. An escort she must have, and Sir Philip could not leave his sick wife, nor Charlie his reading. With him she would at any rate be safe, and the future must be left to unfold itself.

Others were far more sensible than Lina herself of his great and valuable kindness in thus offering to be her protector, but the Vicar wanted thanks from no one. He wanted nothing but Dora's undivided attention while he poured forth directions and arrangements which she must see carried out during his absence. All was settled with wonderful speed. Lina's children, to whom their mother had given scarcely a single thought, were to be transferred from the Hanger to the Grange, and placed under the care of Dora and Miss Goode. There they would be both safe and happy ; and when this had been arranged, there was nothing more to wait for. Within six hours from the final decision, the travellers were gone.

CHAPTER VII.

‘Sans tache et sans peur.’

THEY were gone—but the evil that one of them had done was left behind her. Mr. Lister, on paying a second visit to his patient later in the day, found her so seriously weakened by all she had gone through, that he urged upon Sir Philip the propriety of calling in further advice. The latter had never been willing to entertain any real apprehensions about a delicacy which it had always pleased him to term ‘chiefly on the nerves,’ and, though he now yielded in fact, he merely informed Charlie that it was his intention to go up to London the next morning to inquire whether any further particulars had been received from the seat of war, and that being in town he would take the opportunity of calling upon Dr. Arthur, a physician who had once before attended Lady Merivale, and proposing that he should again pay her a visit.

Charlie’s mind was so little disturbed by the intelligence that he found no difficulty in settling himself down for a morning’s reading directly his father had quitted the house, expecting no

interruption to a peaceful day, since his mother would not require him before the afternoon. Absolute quiet was what she most needed, and it had been agreed that even Dora and Miss Goode should not appear that day.

Charlie, however, had not spent quite an hour in Aristotle's company when an interruption came. A gentleman had called to speak to Sir Philip upon business, and, finding him not at home, had inquired for himself. With reluctant fingers he took the card brought by the servant, which bore the unknown name of 'Mr. Mason,' and repaired to the library to receive his visitor.

A businesslike-looking, middle-aged man was awaiting him, and Charlie, bowing somewhat absently—his head full of Aristotle—begged to know whether he could be of use in conveying a message to his father.

'Thank you, sir. Mr. Charles Merivale, I believe?'

As Charlie acknowledged the fact he felt that the new-comer's eyes were fastened upon him with an unusual degree of attention.

'Sir Philip,' he said, 'has gone to town for the day, but I could tell him anything on his return, or would you prefer leaving a note?'

'Thank you.' Mr. Mason paused. 'I believe, Mr. Merivale, that I am an entire stranger to you?'

Charlie assented.

‘You may, however, have heard of my name—you may be aware that I am one of the partners in the Compton Bank?’

‘I am afraid—I do not think I was—my father, no doubt, would know it well, but I am a good deal away from the Hanger, and I do not think I ever happened to hear much about the Compton Bank.’

‘Indeed.’ Another pause, during which Charlie was again aware of the same closely observant gaze. ‘I have not,’ continued Mr. Mason, ‘the honour of being personally acquainted with Sir Philip Merivale, nor was my business in reality with him, but with yourself.’

‘With me?’

‘Yes, sir, with you; it is business closely connected with the Bank—business, I regret to say, of a singularly disagreeable nature.’

Charlie put Aristotle down in astonishment. What could this slow, strange man possibly be going to say to him? He begged his visitor to be seated, and took a chair himself.

Mr. Mason drew a letter from his pocket-book. ‘First,’ he said, ‘allow me to ask you whether this letter is addressed to yourself or to any other Charles Merivale?’

Charlie took it in his hand, opened and examined it. It was one of his numerous Oxford letters, received a few months before.

‘To me, certainly. But how did you get it?’

‘I will tell you, sir.’ Mr. Mason took the letter from Charlie’s passive fingers, and carefully replaced it in his pocket-book before continuing. ‘Ten days ago a cheque for 20*l.*, payable to John Smith, was given in at the Bank, purporting to be drawn by Mr. Jonas Grover, of Arnborough, who has an account with us. It was presented by a young man, and cashed by one of our clerks. As this person, whoever he might be, left the Bank, he drew a handkerchief from his pocket; a letter fell from it. Our clerk, perceiving this, went round to pick it up and return it, but before he could effect his purpose the man was gone, nor could he see him in the street. Mr. White then laid the letter by, in case it might be inquired for. One day last week Mr. Grover came to the Bank and asked to see his account. The 20*l.* cheque appeared to surprise him; he remembered none such, and on examination of the cheque itself at once declared it to be a forgery. The clerk who had cashed it was then questioned by us. He recalled the circumstance of the letter; he had it still, and produced it.’ Here Mr. Mason paused, looking earnestly into Charlie’s wondering eyes. ‘That letter, Mr. Merivale, was the same that I have just shown to you.’

‘My letter! But how did it get there?’

‘That is exactly the question I have come here to ask you.’

‘I cannot imagine. I don’t believe I know any John Smith.’

‘The name,’ remarked Mr. Mason dryly, ‘like other things, was, no doubt, false.’

‘Ah, of course, it would be. But I have no correspondent among forgers, I hope and believe. Besides, anyhow, I can’t see how it could come about; for you see the letter was to me, not from me.’

‘Just so, Mr. Merivale; and I am now under the necessity of asking you, who is the most likely person to be carrying about letters addressed to yourself?’

Mr. Mason spoke with slow distinctness, as though rehearsing a lesson learnt beforehand.

‘Who carries about my letters? Why, nobody I should think—I should hope, at all events—excepting myself.’

The frank tone seemed for a moment to silence his companion. He bent forward, locking the interlacing fingers of his hands tightly together, and keeping his eyes on the floor, while he said in the same constrained manner:

‘Yourself—true. But then, do you not see that this might lead us to—a very strange—a very unwelcome conclusion?’

‘What?’ Charlie’s puzzled countenance

showed that he had not yet caught the drift of the inquiry, but it was for a moment only. The next, and the word was repeated in a very different tone, as he sprang to his feet and, with a scarlet flush of anger rushing to his face, cried, ‘You do not mean to say—you do not dare to say that you think *I* did it!’

‘I am here,’ said Mr. Mason in the same measured tones, ‘in the full hope that you will prove to us the contrary.’

‘And what proof can you possibly want, excepting my word?’

‘Assertion, Mr. Merivale, is not proof. The nature of the case unfortunately prevents us from accepting a mere assertion; but a proof of any kind we should be most thankful to receive.’

Charlie sank down again in the chair—his father’s chair—and all the Merivale blood, which generally flowed so gently through his veins, seemed mustering with haughty indignation in his face.

‘To ask for such a thing is an unwarrantable insult! To assume that I, whom you never saw before in your life—my father’s son—would be capable of such a deed! To ask me to disprove it, as if I were a criminal! You had better leave the house, sir, and write to my father’s lawyer!’

Mr. Mason did not stir. ‘Excuse me,’ he said, ‘and hear me to the end. We have made no charge against anyone; we have merely asked

ourselves a question—the same that I asked you, and have answered it in the very way in which you answered it yourself. We are perfectly well aware that your letter may have passed into another person's possession; if so, it is of importance to us to learn who that person may be. I am here to ask whether you can assist us in this inquiry. Could it be any servant?’

‘No,’ was the instant reply. ‘I have no more reason to accuse a single servant than you have to accuse me.’

‘Mr. Merivale, excuse me. I have as yet accused no one; I have merely stated facts, so far as I know them, and to discover more facts is my only desire. This happened on a Saturday—Saturday week. Would you tell me if you were in Compton yourself on that day?’

‘Very possibly,’ was the cold reply. ‘I have been into Compton several times lately for letters. I was there more than once the week before last, and one day may have been Saturday; indeed, I now remember it was, for it was market day.’

‘And you put up your horse, I believe,’ remarked Mr. Mason quietly, ‘not at the usual place, but at a public-house outside the town.’

The angry flush again returned to Charlie's brow. ‘You appear to have been inquiring into my movements, sir, and you are perfectly right. I did put him up at the “Feathers”; he was a young one, and shied so much at the things

coming out of the market, that I would not take him on to the "Crown." You may believe it or not as you please.'

'You mistake me very much,' answered Mr. Mason quietly, 'if you think I have the smallest desire to disbelieve you ; but you must suffer me to point out that the circumstance of your being in Compton that afternoon would make it very difficult to prove an alibi.'

'I have no wish to prove it, and no need. Since my word is not enough, let your clerk who paid the cheque see me ; he at any rate will be able to tell you that I am not the man !'

'Had that been the case,' said Mr. Mason with grave emphasis, 'I should not now be here.'

'*Had* been ! How ? I do not understand you.'

'Mr. White has seen you already. By our wish he attended your church last Sunday morning ; he saw you there.'

'He did ! Well, what more can you want ?'

Mr. Mason shook his head. 'I am obliged to tell you, sir, that his evidence goes against you ; he believes the cheque was presented by yourself.'

Charlie sat silent with amazement.

'We are aware that a mistake may have been made. Our Bank was darkened for a time by a scaffolding for external repairs—also, Mr. White is somewhat shortsighted.'

'And on the evidence of such a witness as

this you have thought it right to believe such a monstrous charge !’

‘Pardon me—I have never said we believed it ; but we could not refuse to receive it, nor to consider it. Mr. White is firm : he is ready to swear that, to the best of his belief, you are the man. Was it possible for us on hearing this to take no further steps ? How anxious we have felt that you might be able to disprove the charge I think we now show by the somewhat unusual course we have taken in inquiring personally, as I have now done, if you can throw any light on the subject.’

Charlie’s anger was cooling ; he began to see that Mr. Mason might possibly have some reason on his side.

‘If I have been hasty,’ he said, in a different tone, ‘I am sorry for it, though still it seems to me that you have done and said more than this.’

‘Not more than we conceived ourselves bound to do before entering on the affair with you at all. But I must tell you that you soon must have heard of it, if not from us. It is already spoken of in Compton, I regret to say.’

‘Indeed !’

‘In spite of all our efforts, we have found it impossible to silence the party chiefly concerned.’

‘Ah !—Grover. No doubt.’

‘When I say chiefly concerned, the loss does not fall on him ; that is made good by the Bank.

Had we known how indiscreet Mr. Grover would have been we should have been more guarded in examining Mr. White before him; but there appears to be some private feeling' Mr. Mason paused.

'Certainly there is. He would never miss an opportunity of speaking against this family.'

'So, I am sorry to say, I have since been informed. I heartily wish his mouth could be stopped. Can you give us no assistance, Mr. Merivale, as to the history of that letter? No clue whatever as to its possible possessor?'

Charlie shook his head.

'Can it have been left about, do you think?'

'Most likely. My letters generally are.'

Whatever Mr. Mason's opinion of young men's careless habits might be, he suppressed it.

'And you really cannot account for its appearance in any way—you do not at all know how it could possibly have been dropped in our Bank ten days ago?'

Mr. Mason had been searching into the eyes which met his, unable to resist a growing conviction that a more open gaze of perfect innocence no one could ever have beheld, when suddenly he was conscious of a change. Something passed across the expression of those eyes, and a colour rose slowly into Charlie's cheeks. This was not the sudden flush of anger. Could it possibly be the blush of shame? The next

moment he had turned in his chair, and, raising his hand in such a way as nearly to conceal his face he paused, before answering—

‘No ; I do not know.’

‘You do not know at all?’

‘I do not know at all.’

The tone was firm, and yet his hearer felt or fancied it was less frank than before, and was silent—lost in perplexities and doubts. Charlie, too, seemed to be pondering.

‘And now,’ he said at length, as he again turned towards his visitor, ‘may I ask what your next step will be?’

Mr. Mason had taken a second letter from his pocket, and was looking at it in some apparent uncertainty.

‘I—I can hardly tell, sir. It does not altogether depend upon myself.’

‘If you are wishing to take legal steps of any kind,’ was the proud reply, ‘you need not be afraid to say so. I shall be perfectly ready.’

‘It is the last thing we should wish—the very last. To make any charge against any member of Sir Philip Merivale’s family would be most repugnant to our feelings.’ Again he looked at the letter in his hand.

‘Well, Mr. Mason, it is for yourselves to decide. I can only repeat—I am ready.’

‘Mr. Merivale, I had better speak openly. This letter, which is from my colleagues and my-

self, was entrusted by them to me to be left with Sir Philip in case it seemed advisable. On consideration, I should not feel justified in withholding it. May I place it in your hands for him?’

Charlie took it. ‘Am I not to read it myself?’ he asked.

‘Certainly—undoubtedly, when I am gone.’

‘But why not at once?’

‘Excuse me; it would be better not. The answer to that letter will require thought—it must not be hastily given.’ He rose as he spoke. ‘You will consult with your father over it—you will speak openly with him, I beg, I entreat you. You are young yet, very young, and——’ Mr. Mason paused, looking at Charlie with an expression in which many conflicting feelings seemed mingled.

‘I shall certainly speak to my father about it. There is nothing for me to conceal from him.’

‘Then I need detain you no longer; my business for to-day is done. I wish, Mr. Merivale, it had been of a pleasanter nature. You may believe it is only a sense of duty that has brought me here.’

Charlie bowed a stately bow as he walked to the door to let his visitor out.

‘Good morning, Mr. Merivale.’

There was a struggle visible in Charlie’s face—then he held out his hand.

‘Good morning, Mr. Mason. I do believe,

in spite of everything, that you meant to act for the best in coming here.'

Mr. Mason took the hand—he could do no less ; neither could he help the swiftly returning conviction that such a countenance and manner belonged to a man too noble to stoop even to the slightest meanness. Yet what would his fellow-partners say ? When they should ask what proofs he had discovered of Charles Merivale's innocence, could he bring forward as conclusive the facts that he was tall and handsome, and had all the outward marks of a gentleman ? A poor satisfaction indeed to produce for the benefit of his companions—of Mr. Aldis, the stern senior partner, whose consent had been hardly won to the writing of that letter just left in Charlie's hand ! What would that letter produce ? Much as Mr. Mason meditated over this question on his homeward drive, he found himself quite unable to decide on the most probable answer. There were moments when he could not even feel satisfied that he had done well in leaving it at all.

Certainly no letter owning the respectable signatures of Aldis, Broad, & Mason had ever been known to meet with such treatment as this one speedily received. Before its bearer had reached the gates of the Hanger it was lying on the library floor, torn across, and bearing the marks of all the nails in the heel of one of Charlie's boots. He had trampled on it in a fit

of uncontrollable indignation—had rushed to the window to see whether his late visitor were gone past all recall, and, returning, had paced the room with a face filled with an expression of proud disgust, such as it had never yet worn in the whole course of his life. He could hardly bring himself to touch the letter again or to read the hateful words that had roused such a storm of anger in his breast. It must be done, however; and with lips compressed as though nerving himself to bear sharp pain, he raised the torn pages, placed them on the table before him, and prepared to go steadily through the whole.

It began with civil expressions of regret on the part of the firm, and then proceeded to narrate with minuteness all the facts relating to the presentation of the cheque—the evidence they had received of Mr. Charles Merivale being in town on that afternoon, and their own clerk's belief that he was the person who presented the cheque. It stated that Mr. Grover mentioned having more than once addressed letters to Sir Philip Merivale, so that his handwriting might easily be known to any member of his family, and proceeded thus:—

‘Having carefully weighed such evidence as we have been able to collect, we cannot but fear that your son, if placed in a court of justice, might find himself in a very awkward position. Even if the evidence were not, in the eye of the law, sufficient to convict him, it might seriously

damage him in the estimation of many. We need not say with what extreme reluctance we should proceed against any member of so ancient and honourable a family. Yet we have not been able to reconcile it with our sense of duty to pass the matter over entirely without bringing to your notice the above-mentioned facts. The conclusion to which we have come is this: If your son will himself make an application to us to proceed no further in the affair, no legal advice shall be taken by us on the subject, and perfect secrecy shall be observed on our side. We would also do our best to silence Mr. Grover, though our chief difficulty would probably lie in this direction.' They then remained Sir Philip's obedient servants.

Charlie did not hurry over the second perusal as he had done over the first. He read it slowly until he had mastered the whole—the hateful whole, with its impertinently dispassionate statements and insulting, unpardonable proposals. This was not an accusation, it was an assumption of guilt! Henceforth he was to be set down in the minds of these writers as a forger, his character to be spared by the kind forbearance of themselves and of such a man as Grover! Again he seized the paper to tear it in pieces, but checked himself. This was a time for the action of a man, not for the passion of a child. He went to a table and wrote the following words:—

‘GENTLEMEN,—I have read your letter. It shall be answered immediately. I require neither reflection nor counsel to assist me in absolutely declining to make any application to you to stay whatever proceedings you may please to take in this matter, nor could anyone in the remotest degree interested in our family honour wish that I should do so. It would be nothing less than owning myself to be a forger. Allow me to inform you that I am not one.

‘Your obedient servant,

‘CHARLES ERNEST MERIVALE.’

Charlie was in general little apt to care for the outward adornment of his letters; but now he looked round for the large family seal which his father always used. Nothing else should fasten this letter; and if his sister Frances could have seen the countenance bent over the firm, clear impression, and the voice that repeated its fearless motto—‘*Sans tache et sans peur*’—she might have withdrawn an assertion occasionally made by her that Charlie had ‘nothing of a Merivale’ in his composition. None of the ancestors looking down from the walls had ever worn a prouder face than his as he rose and again began, with folded arms, to pace the room.

‘“*Sans tache et sans peur*.” I hope those fellows will read and understand it. Now what will they do? Prosecute me? They ought.

When they make such a charge as this they are bound in honour to give a man the opportunity of disproving it. But—honour! what do they know of honour, if they think it possible I could do this thing and disgrace my family for ever?’

Such were his first excited thoughts and feelings. But Charlie was not made for anger. Before long the tumult of passion died away, and a sensation of something like pity took its place when he reflected on the confusion that must cover his accusers when they should come to understand the greatness of their mistake. He took the unfortunate letter to fold and lay by for his father, and in doing so the other letter came into his mind. Would it be put in as evidence—read aloud to a listening jury? At the thought of hearing Jack Archer’s letter—scribbled off in the University barge—full of terms and allusions known only to their own boating set—being proclaimed aloud by a lawyer in a wig, in a solemn court of justice, and at the thought of the face Jack would make when he heard of it, Charlie laughed so heartily that he shortly found himself ready to turn to common life and Aristotle again.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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